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RETURNING STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS, REASONS FOR REENTRY, AND EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES IN A SELECTED TEXAS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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RETURNING STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS, REASONS FOR REENTRY, AND EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES IN A SELECTED TEXAS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2011

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to several people that have been instrumental in guiding me along my life's path. First, I dedicate this work to the memory of my grandfather, Cornelio Briseno, an early pioneer of the La Blanca, Texas area. ―Papa‖ immigrated to the United States in 1910 to escape the revolution in Mexico. Papa believed education was the way to succeed in the new country and he not only encouraged his children to attend school, but hired a private tutor to further their education in the home. Many years ago, he replaced my high school graduation ring after I lost it and later, he literally put me on the road to higher education by making me a small loan so that I could transfer to U.T. San Antonio. When I repaid the funds, he unquestionably took the envelope and without counting the money he placed it back in his shirt pocket. Papa's love and encouragement have remained with me all of these years and I know that he was and would be proud of me today.

This is also dedicated to my mother, Ernestina Briseno Aguilar who taught her children the values of persistence and hard work; to my two brothers - Eduardo and Luciano Aguilar – certainly meant to achieve great endeavors of their own had they been born with all of their faculties; to my brother Ubaldo and my two sisters – Teresa and Elodia – for persevering through their own challenges and triumphs.

I cannot forget to dedicate this endeavor to Papa's children – my aunts and uncles who helped my mother raise my siblings and me when they did not have to. ―Mi Familia‖ consists of my aunts: Enedina (Cha-Cha), Felipa (Pipa), Teofila (China), and Estefana (Prieta) Briseno, and my uncles: Francisco (Franque) and Zaragosa (Tagocha) Briseno all of San Carlos, Texas.

Finally, I owe this dissertation to my late husband, Dr. William V. Wilkinson, who was a dedicated criminal justice professor. Bill fully understood how hard it can be for someone to follow their dreams. Yet he was magnanimous in giving me the freedom and fortitude to, ―Follow your Taos because you will never know where it will lead you.‖ He demonstrated infinite patience and respect for me and the road that I chose to follow. I miss him each and everyday in everything that I do and his words of encouragement have sustained me on a journey that has taken many twists and turns along the way. Bill dedicated his dissertation to me and I hereby dedicate mine to him.

This dissertation represents the culmination of one hundred years of inherited educational expectations that have coursed through my veins with each heartbeat – to do well and succeed in the new country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank first and foremost, my dissertation committee members for giving of their time and guidance in this final endeavor of my doctoral studies. I am grateful to Dr. Martha N. Ovando for making room for one more student and encouraging me to complete the program at a time when it would have been easier to just walk away from it; to Dr. Nolan Estes, a fellow South Texan from Rio Hondo, for being instrumental in recruiting me and having faith that I would someday finish; to Dr. Novell Northcutt who has always offered to help me in any way that he can. He is also an awesome and approachable statistics professor – no fear; to the late Dr. Michael Thomas who recognized and empathized what it is like for someone to struggle with health issues that take precedence in our busy and complicated lives when we have other goals and plans in mind; and finally, to Dr. Christopher Ellison, for being an avant-garde professor, objective thinker, and lecturer. His classes allowed for fantastic interactive discussions and gave me one of my best scholastic experiences at U.T. Austin. His resume is next to none. Each one of these individuals has qualities that I hope to someday emulate should I finally achieve my life long dream of someday becoming a college professor.

I would also like to thank "Mis Amigas" from the Texas Education Agency that encouraged me to finish – Dr. Maria Luisa Huckstein-for her angels, crystal beads, and prayers; Dr. Sylvia Ann Gonzales for giving me survival advice; to Dr. Esther L. McCord for encouraging me to write, write, write, and to Dr. Aida Alanis for never allowing me to think about quitting. I am grateful to my dear friend Mrs. Lina Flores and her husband Mr. Manual Flores for giving of their precious time to help me code. Both of these individuals have been great friends and are seasoned school administrators. Their words of encouragement throughout the years have kept me on track when I was ready to just

veer off course. Finally, thanks goes out to Dr. Norman and Mrs. Lavonne Mason for showing me how to “mau-mau” the system.

There are several teachers that I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart for serving and giving of their time to help me member-check the qualitative part of this dissertation. These teachers work at Houston Elementary in the Austin Independent School District and they graciously volunteered their time right before Christmas of 2009 to help me code the lengthy interviews. They are Mr. Michael Green, Ms. Monica Alcala, Ms. Megan Steffel, Mr. Ramiro Reyes, Mr. Juan Villasana, Mrs. Nancy Fisher, Ms. Susan Hunt, and Ms. Jill Touchstone. The teachers at Houston have always given over above and beyond to their students and have built a fantastic professional learning community. The fact that Houston reached the Recognized level under TEA’s Academic Educational Information System (AEIS) in the Spring of 2010 is a testament to their hard work.

I need to mention Mr. Matt Behal. Matt has been a great friend for many years. He was originally my supervisor while at Los Fresnos Elementary and later he became my fellow assistant principal at the same school. Years, later, we became reacquainted while working at the Texas Education Agency and he became my good buddy and confidante. Matt volunteered to be my professional debriefer while I was conducting the on-site research. He was also instrumental to the research by utilizing his varied administrative background to code one of the lengthy principal interviews during the member checking phase. I will always cherish the memories of the good times that Matt spent with Bill and me. He was instrumental in helping me through Bill’s lengthy illness and later by being a great listener as I made my way through the grieving process. He is possibly the only person on Earth, that knows the full extent of all of my trials and tribulations that I have endured while on this path that has taken many years to traverse.

I also acknowledge and thank the Great Creator for allowing my current life's path to cross that of another soul mate from a previous lifetime. Literally, Mr. Mark Lee Adleman has stepped into Bill's shoes and helped renew my faith that I can finish my magnus opus because, "We don't quit."

Finally and once again, a special thanks goes out to Dr. Martha N. Ovando, for simply not giving up on me. I set a time line for myself at the beginning of this program, but numerous daunting and unforeseen life events simply interfered. Life has a way of demanding that one's personal energy reserves be expended for those pressing things that need immediate attention. Dr. Ovando, along with my late husband Bill, and the late Dr. Michael Thomas were instrumental in rescuing one more doctoral school dropout. This dissertation is partially about the effective characteristics in an alternative high school dropout recovery program that help students persevere and complete their studies. I can fully relate as to how it feels to be a recovered doctoral program dropout and can attest to the fact that words of encouragement go a very long way.

Muchas Gracias to all,

with lots of love and heartfelt thanks…

....Linda

RETURNING STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS, REASONS FOR REENTRY, AND EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES IN A SELECTED TEXAS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Publication No. _____

Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Martha N. Ovando

The purpose of this research was to ascertain the characteristics of dropouts, their rationale for reentry, and what constituted effective practices within a Texas alternative education program (AEP). While, a number of studies have been conducted to explain why students drop out of school, more research was needed in the area of students that reenter to complete their studies (Fernandez, Paulsen & Hiranko-Nakanishi, 1996; Krashen, 1998; NCES, 1981; Pirog & Magee, 1997; Ramsey, 1988; Rumberger, 1995; Warren, 1996; White & Kaufman, 1997). The study utilized qualitative methodology with a case-study approach by utilizing small groups within the context of an organization (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The study site was purposely selected (Kuzel, 1992; Morse, 1989) using low-socio-economic criteria, ethnic representation, an AEIS rating of *Commended,* and a high graduation rate. Site participant selection included

comprehensive sampling (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984) of the AEP personnel and random sampling of the student participants and their respective parents. The primary data was collected using a modified three-interview method (Dolbeare and Schuman, 1982) with corroborating document review and focus groups. Findings indicated that research participants could identify seventeen different characteristics for returning high school students. Some of the characteristics describing these students also reflect their motivation or rationale for returning back to complete their high school studies. The study revealed four major practices within the AEP that supported the program and its students towards their mission of graduating. These were: hiring the right personnel, monitoring academic progress, providing student support services, and maintaining a safe school climate. A resultant theme indicated that there was a need to promote a positive image of the value of the AEP. Since only ten participants and five students were included in the study, the findings can only be tentatively generalized. Finally, suggestions are made for AEP programs to be designed to entice students not only to return back to school, but to remain until their goal to graduate is realized.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS & SUMMARIES

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

APPENDICES

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter I

Introduction

On May 30, 2003 the Texas Education Agency (TEA) released the preliminary results of the *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills* (TAKS). The results indicated that the more rigorous state mandated assessment instrument had resulted in a large number of secondary students who were unable to pass all parts of the test.

These initial TAKS results suggested that many minority and poor students may have had a difficult time passing the exit tests at the secondary level and that this same population of students may have experienced greater retention-in-grade rates at the elementary grade levels. As time passed, it was feared that many students would be unable to pass all parts of the TAKS test or any subsequent state mandated assessments. This situation had the potential of creating a larger pool of retained and discouraged students who might decide to drop out of school entirely or to seek alternative education programs as a means to complete their educations outside of the regular educational setting.

Background of the Study

In prior years, national educational laws had been enacted that directly addressed the problem of dropouts and/or dropout recovery through alternative schools. On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 (Public Law 107-110). This new law represented the President's educational reform plan and contained the most sweeping changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since it was

enacted in 1965. The act contained the President's four basic educational reform principles: stronger accountability for results; increased flexibility and local control; expanded options for parents; and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.

This new ―accountable‖ education system involved several critical steps. Among these steps were state-developed standards in mathematics, reading, and science with testing aligned to these standards. Each state, school district, and school was expected to make *adequate yearly progress* (AYP) towards meeting certain goals. This progress was to be measured for *all* student groups. Achievement goals were specified for students from economically disadvantaged households, from certain minority groups, with disabilities, or with limited English proficiency. The message and intent of NCLB was clear: districts or schools that continually failed to make adequate progress were to be held accountable. The NCLB recognized that ―information is power; testing and gathering independent data are ways to get information into the hands of parents, educators and taxpayers. Testing provides information. Until teachers and parents recognize what their students know and can do, they can't help them improve. Testing will raise expectations for all students and ensure that no child slips through the cracks‖ (NCLB, 2002).

Obviously, NCLB expected educators to use the test results to help the students improve to the point that they would eventually meet or exceed the state-developed standards. At the same time, these educators were being held accountable to parents and the taxpayers for student progress. Another result of the NCLB was the reauthorization of the School Dropout Prevention program as authorized under Title I, Part H of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This reauthorization initiative provided grants to state and local education agencies to support

school dropout prevention and reentry activities. Grantees were expected to implement effective, sustainable and coordinated school dropout prevention programs (NCLB, 2002, September, 2002b, October, 2003a, March). Through this initiative, NCLB aimed to impact the prevention and/or recovery of dropouts. In addition, emphasis was placed on the tie between grant monies awarded and effective results-based programs and activities.

The NCLB law continued to be clearly supportive of alternative education programs. Starting with the 2003-2004 school year, the primary beneficiaries of these reform mandates were charter schools where parents could choose to transfer their students from low-performing schools. Charter schools are public schools which are largely free to innovate in terms of curriculum and instructional methods; they often provide more effective programs and choice to underserved groups of students.

School districts were required to use federal funding to provide meaningful choices as well as to provide transportation to the new schools families chose. Where charter schools were not available, school districts could create their own public alternative education programs or expand programs already in existence (NCLB, 2002, September, 2002b, October, 2003a, March).

An urgent need existed to find answers about what constituted an effective alternative education program. In the summer 2002 issue of *News from OAEA,* published by the Office of Alternative Education Accountability (OAEA), educators in registered public alternative education programs were asked to provide OAEA with input on model programs that exhibited best practices and that had demonstrated successful student performance over time. The director of OAEA, Rosemary Manges, stated that none of the three hundred registered public alternative education programs in the state of Texas contacted OAEA about effective practices that could be

shared with and/or replicated by other educators. The OAEA frequently received calls from educators asking that the OAEA provide names of public alternative education campuses that were willing to be visited in an effort to gain knowledge of successful practices (Manges, a series of personal interviews held from Summer 2002 through spring 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Since 1999, alternative education programs or campuses that chose to register with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) were held to different standards for purposes of accreditation status; however, the students still had to meet the same graduation requirements as students enrolled in regular education programs in order to receive their diploma. Similarly, these students had to take the same tests as other students to receive a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The passage of NCLB caused the alternative education programs in Texas to no longer be able to participate in the Agency's Registered Alternative Accountability System. The performance requirements of the NCLB meant that all students were to be provided an equal education regardless of the educational program that they were attending; all districts and programs were to be evaluated under one accountability system. In Texas, this became known as the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) (Appendix A).

Consequently, as soon as the NCLB law passed, TEA quickly disbanded the Office of Alternative Education Programs (OAEP). This decision was made because NCLB stipulated that Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was to be used as a measure of student progress for each campus and for each school district. If TEA had continued to have an Office of Alternative Education Programs, the continued participation by alternative education programs as

independent and stand-alone campuses would have made them vulnerable under the more stringent NCLB criteria, possibly resulting in ratings of low performance.

To illustrate this point, state compensatory education (SCE) funds in Texas had traditionally been used to fund alternative education programs; however, Senate Bill 702 (Appendix B) now required that the assessment data for the at- risk student populations be compared to all other student groups within a district to gauge program effectiveness with regard to narrowing the achievement gap between this group and other student groups. Specifically, the SCE programs had to be evaluated in the following two ways:

1. Effectiveness in reducing any disparity in performance on assessment instruments between ―students at risk of dropping out of school‖ and all other district students.
2. Effectiveness in reducing any disparity in rates of high school completion between ―students at risk of dropping out of school‖ and all other district students.

The Commissioner of Education was to adopt accountability measures to be used in school year 2003-2004 for assessing the progress of students who had failed to perform satisfactorily in the preceding school year on an assessment instrument required under Texas Education Code (TEC) Section 39.023 (a), (c) or (l). Consequently, the progress of students who had failed to perform satisfactorily in the preceding school year on the required assessment instrument was used to determine a district‘s accreditation rating in school year 2003-2004 (TEA, 2001). There was also the old but continuing debate among educators and researchers about whether raising expectations for all students was detrimental to those least likely to meet the mandates of the new reforms (McDill, Natriello, and Pallas, 1986). Research was needed to assess whether students enrolled in a public alternative education program could possibly meet

the standard of *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* as mandated in the new reforms of NCLB (NCLB, 2002; U. S. Department of Education, 2002, September, 2002b, October, 2003a, March). Additional information was needed about characteristics of students in alternative education programs and on the effectiveness of these programs.

Purpose of the Research

This study utilized case study methodology, document review, roundtables, and classroom observations to determine the characteristics of students who had already dropped out of a public school, but who had chosen to return to an alternative education program to complete their high school program. This study determined the reasons that these students had for making a decision to return to school. Further, the study identified and described effective practices existing in an alternative education program. The program selected for this study was rated as *Commended* under the TEA's Office of Alternative Education Accountability (OAEA), Division of Accountability Development and Support during the 2000-01 school-years.

Research Questions

The study used a survey and interviews to compile a profile of the characteristics of the randomly selected Grade 9-12 at-risk students enrolled in a Texas *Commended* alternative education program for a period of at least 80 days. Then, the case study used a qualitative data analysis to compare the themes apparent from the stakeholder interviews for commonly identified best practices that might contribute to student success within the framework of an alternative education setting. The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the Grade 9-12 students who have dropped out and later returned to school to complete their studies in a selected alternative education program?
2. What are the reasons that returning students give for making a decision to enroll in a selected alternative education program?
3. What do the students and stakeholders in a selected Texas registered alternative education program perceive as effective practices of the program that encourage students to return and complete their educations?

Rationale of the Study

This research resulted from three different categories of purposes: personal purposes; practical purposes; and research purposes (Maxwell, 1996). On the personal level, the subject for this research was formalized about four years prior to the time of the study. As an inner-city middle school assistant principal in a large metropolitan school district, the major portion of the day consisted of dealing with disciplinary problems; many times the only remedy available for persistent misbehavior was suspension to the home for a period of a half day to three days. In severe cases, the students were removed to the district's disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) for periods ranging from one day to six weeks. At times, extreme cases warranted mandatory removal due to dire infractions meaning that the students were placed in the DAEP for periods of up to one semester. Upon returning from these long-term placements, the students went through a period of reintegration and readjustment back into the home campus. The students seemed to be calmer and more at peace with themselves upon their return; yet they almost invariably ended up in trouble again, which required their removal from

campus once again. Many times, the students made the following comments about their experiences at the alternative education program: "the teachers are nicer;" "I can concentrate better;" "I get help on my work;" "I don't have to watch my back there;" —I'd rather be over there;‖ or —I like it better.‖ On occasion, their grades and attendance also improved not only during the time that they were in the DAEP, but for a period of time after returning to the home campus.

These shared perspectives, on behalf of the students, became the impetus for the sustained interest in this topic. In addition, the —revolving-door‖ disciplinary practices that prevailed were suspected to be contributing to the dropout rates. Further, the intense efforts and subsequent stress levels required to maintain a safe school environment and the need to manage multi-ethnic and culturally diverse student bodies were speculative in possibly being contributing factors to the dropout rates of both teachers and administrators from the educational profession. Many times, it seemed as if though opening separate schools for these students would better serve their needs and free educators' time to address the educational needs of the students who were well adjusted to attending public schools. There were no winners in this recurring scenario: the "good" students--those who behaved and were serious about their educations—were cheated of time and attention. Conversely, the "bad" students--those who misbehaved and were not serious about their educations--received a disproportionate share of time and attention from school personnel. After three years of serving in this capacity, an obvious conclusion materialized that it was obvious that neither group of students was able to have their needs totally met by the overwhelmed teachers and administrators. Unfortunately, many of these students did

not make it past the middle school grades. Overwhelmed and discouraged from numerous suspensions and a myriad of other personal problems that ranged from pregnancy, running away, drug use, gang involvement, and unstable home environments, they eventually dropped out.

As an educator, one cannot help but feel powerless to change this existing paradigm. The realization that this situation had a tremendous personal impact on students' lives along with the incalculable loss to society was a strong impetus for this research topic. In an effort to lend insight and pave the way for paradigm change in this arena, this dissertation topic makes an effort to contribute further to the prevailing literature in the area of dropout recovery. The reader must be aware that I was fully cognizant of my concerns and/or biases and how they might possibly shape this research. Nonetheless, personal ties provided valuable insight, theory, and data about the phenomena or topic of this study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, pp. 22-25; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 42-43). A subjective role in this research served as a major source of insight, hypotheses, and validity checks (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 104). In addition, use of technical knowledge, research background, and personal experiences help to raise possible biases to the conscious level and to use this *critical subjectivity* as part of the inquiry process (Reason, 1988, p. 12; 1984; Strauss, 1987 p. 11). Finally, this research has become the culminating product of doctoral studies that may eventually lead to a professorial position at the university level. This research defines the future foundation for professorial responsibilities, research interests, and other scholarly activities.

A second rationale for conducting this study was from the practical aspect of contributing to possible administrative or policy changes in an effort to shift the paradigm that currently exists for too many dropouts. Disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) are available only

to students who have been removed from their home campus for locally identified and applicable infractions, and at times, for violating Chapter 37 rules of the Texas Education Code (TEA, 1999). Once the student is removed from his/her home campus, the alternative placement is for only a short period of time with the student eventually returning to the home campus. Educators may also remove a student from a home campus if a student becomes involved in the juvenile justice system where a court judge may rule that the student must be incarcerated in a Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP), or for more serious offenses, a student may be remanded for periods of incarceration into the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) facilities.

Consequently, these three alternative educational settings - DAEPs, JJAEPs, and TYCs are not choices available to students who have simply opted to drop out of a public school and who wish to return and complete their educations. This case study focused on those students who had already dropped out of public schools and had made a conscious choice to attend a "school of choice." Specifically, an alternative education program (AEP), that was registered with the Texas Education Agency and that had received the AEIS accreditation rating of *Commended*. Traditionally, these alternative schools have only been available to students in Grades 9-12 and only if the student has already been designated as dropout or at-risk of failing and becoming a dropout. If some of these AEPs had been rated *Commended*, then there was a need to know or identify the effective educational practices that kept the students engaged in learning. Why shouldn't these alternative schools be available to all students who wished to enroll and attend by personal or parental choice? If NCLB gave parents the option of moving their students to charter schools, then the parent should also have the option of withdrawing their

children from a particular public school campus and into the district's AEP. This choice would be simple to make for both parents and students if the AEP program had both effective practices in place and an acceptable AEIS rating.

The final rationale of the study was for research purposes: understanding something; gaining some insight into what is going on and why this is happening (Maxwell, 1996, p. 16). The crux of the study was to clarify some definite criteria or to reveal the effective practices contributing to the success of the particular Commended AEP campus that was selected for this study. Then, and only then, could teachers, administrators, and policymakers have some concept of the programmatic strategies that needed to be evident in public alternative education programs to ensure that a higher number of dropouts not only returned to school but, that once they were enrolled, the program would be attractive enough to ensure that they stayed and completed their high school educations. Finally, it was hoped that the identification of some of these effective program strategies, uniquely attributed to this one successful alternative education program setting, could also provide the field of educational research with an idea of what could be lacking in public school settings that may be aliening students to the point that they ended making such a critical decision to become a dropout in the first place.

Significance of the Study

The practical significance (Bonham, 1993) of the study was two-fold. First, the research study focused on student characteristics that pertained specifically to dropouts who had decided to return to school or who had agreed to enroll in an alternative education program. This research made an effort to determine who these students were and the reasons that they had made a decision to return to school. If educators could determine which dropouts returned and why

they returned, maybe they could also strategize how to attract these students back to school to complete their studies. Consequently, this research attempted to illuminate the effective characteristics of an alternative education program, one rated *Commended* under TEA's, previously existing, department for Registered Alternative Education Programs, in an effort to provide educators with specific intervention strategies that might be replicated in a similar or contextually relevant educational environment to improve graduation and/or completion rates. More specifically, the research results seek to impact present and future policy at the state level by providing policymakers with a new body of knowledge detailing specific recommendations for the implementation of effective intervention strategies for dropout prevention and recovery programs. Finally, the research sought to vocalize a need to continue or re-establish a state level centralized department, such as the disbanded Office of Alternative Education Programs (OAEP), to once again monitor and hold alternative education programs for dropout recovery accountable to the public.

The theoretical significance (Bonham, 1993) of the study is that, even though the literature is replete with studies of effective practices in public schools (Alexander, Fennessey, McDill & D'Amico, 1979; Amenta, 1982;Barker and Gump, 1964; Blau & Shoenherr, 1971; Borus, 1985; Cohen & Filipczak, 1971; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Coley, 1995; Diprete, 1982; Duke & Seidman, 1981; Gottfredson, 1984b; Harris, Hedman, & Horning 1983; Levin ,1983; Lotto, 1982; Maurer, 1982; McDill & Rigsby, 1973; McPartland & McDill, 1977; Montecel, 1997; Neumann, 1994; Morgan & Alwin, 1980; Odell, 1974; Quinn & Rutherford, 1998; Ramsey, 1988; Robbins, Mills, & Clark, 1981; Romig, 1978; U.S. Department of Justice,

1980), it is evident that these previous research contributions have not adequately addressed the characteristics of students that have decided to return and complete their studies (NCES, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). Other research postulates that students attending alternative education programs improve attendance and behavior (Gold and Mann, 1984), while other studies have been inconclusive (Cano, 1981; TEA, 1994, March; U. S. Department of Education, 2001, June). Subsequently, there has been a glaring need to know more about these returning dropouts in order to more effectively ascertain how to best meet their needs in completing their educations.

Traditionally, these returning students have opted to complete their studies through enrollment in alternative education programs, but evidence of the effective practices within these programs scant or not evident in the literature. So, even though many advocates of public alternative education programs (Jacobs, 1995, Spring) have reported the successes of at-risk students who have been able to obtain their high school diplomas or the General Educational Development (GED) certificate, ―there is still very little consistent, wide-ranging evidence of their effectiveness or even an understanding of their characteristics‖ (Lange and Sletten, 2002, p. 2). This doctoral study adds to the long and continuing discourse on the subject of alternative education settings and what strategies appear to work or not in recouping high school dropouts (Broad, 1977; Cox, 1999, August; Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2003; Robbins, Mills, & Clark, 1981; Septey, 1995).

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this case study was the time frame that had passed since the staff of the study site initially learned that their alternative education program was rated *Commended*. At the time of the study, some of the faculty members had moved on to other positions, retired,

or moved to other school districts. Comprehensive sampling (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) was employed to ensure that the staff members selected for the study were indeed the most representative and most familiar with the practices in place at the alternative education program so that knowledge central to the study could be obtained and examined (Miles & Huberman, 1984). I utilized comprehensive sampling of staff members because relatively small numbers of staff members are traditionally found in such educational settings. The assumption was made that the practices in place during the 2001-2002 school year still prevailed. A review of the campus improvement plan confirmed that the strategies in use during the year the campus received a rating of *Commended* were still in place in subsequent years. Additionally, staff interviews and document reviews corroborated that the practices that had been in place during that time were still pervasive throughout the program during the time the study was conducted.

A second limitation of the study related to a time lag and how this curtailed access to students who had been in attendance during the 2001-2002 school-years when the alternative education school had been rated *Commended*. Since, most students graduate from alternative education programs within one to two semesters after their enrollment, the study was conducted under the assumption that the current-year students interviewed would help identify some of the same effective strategies that had been and might still be consistently in place within the program. The study hoped to gather detailed accounts and descriptions of the program as to reveal the effective practices that were still relevant and identifiable.

A third limitation to this study has been the previously acknowledged bias that could result from extensive prior experience in the field of education with relation to alternative

education programs; specifically, with regard to having held the positions of urban inner city assistant principal and the position of Programs Specialist with TEA. While in this latter capacity, the occasional review of public alternative education programs could severely affect the positive outcomes of the study either directly or indirectly when seeking to use a case to substantiate a preconceived position (Becker, 1958). At the onset of the study, there were no preconceived ideas of the plausible results; instead, this same experiential background created an awareness of the myriad of possibilities that might be revealed.

A further delimitation was that since this study focused on Grade 9-12 students enrolled in a public alternative education program, it did not address the characteristics of students who may have dropped out prior to Grade 9. In retrospect, raising standards for performance may be pushing or pressuring this at-risk population to drop out of school at increasingly lower grade levels. This situation is especially true for minority and disadvantaged youth, who tend to drop out at earlier ages (Hiranko-Nakanishi, 1984). This study was limited only to those students actually enrolled in a Grade 9-12 public alternative education program and did not address any students who had already dropped out prior to Grade 9.

Other delimitations of the study were that only one *Commended* registered alternative education program campus met the purposeful selection criteria for inclusion in the study. Consequently, the findings or generalizations of this single case study are contextually applicable to this one specific program of the study.

Definition of Terms

1. Accountability System (Texas Model) - The Texas model or accountability system provides for the establishment of academic achievement standards, measurement of student achievement, and measurement of annual student academic growth. The Texas State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education use the state mandated Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) results and other Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) results such as the dropout and attendance rates to determine district accreditation and campus performance ratings. The results of these annual tests are reported to the public each year (TEA, 2001a).

2. Achievement Gap - The difference in performance levels between economically disadvantaged students and non-economically disadvantaged students as indicated by the percentage of students passing TAAS/TAKS Reading, Math, and Writing (when applicable) as administered in Grades 3-8 and Grade 10 for the 2001-2002 school years.

3. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) - An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving academic standards. ―Adequate Yearly Progress‖ is the minimum improvement that states, school districts and schools must achieve each year (NCLB, 2002).

4. African American - A non-Hispanic person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (TEA, 2001a).

5. Alternative Education Program or Campus - An alternative campus is defined as a separate program within its own building, having its own administration, campus identification

number, and budget. For the purposes of this study, an alternative education program (AEP) provides compensatory and accelerated instruction for at-risk students (TEA, 2001a).

6. Asian Pacific Islander - A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, Indian subcontinent, Polynesian Islands, Micronesian Islands, Melanesian Islands, or Philippine Islands (TEA, 2001a).

7. Charter Schools - Independent public schools designed and operated by educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs, and others. Charter schools are sponsored by a designated local or state education organization to monitor their quality and effectiveness as they operate outside of the traditional system of public schools (NCLB, 2002).

8. Disaggregated Data - —Disaggregate‖ means to separate a whole into its parts. In education this term indicates the sorting of test results into student categories such as economically disadvantaged, racial/ethnic groups, students with disabilities, or students with limited English proficiency. This practice allows teachers to set percentage growth targets for each individual student with teacher lesson plans addressing the students‘ needs. Parents, teachers, administrators, and the public can easily see how each student group is performing (NCLB, 2002).

9. Economically disadvantaged students - Income eligibility guidelines set by the United States Secretary of Agriculture establish and identify students who qualify for the free and reduced-price lunch program. In Texas the students are coded as being economically disadvantaged through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) (TEA, 2001a).

10. Hispanic - A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (TEA, 2001a).

11. Limited English Proficient Students - Students whose home language survey indicates that a language other than English is spoken at home and whose language proficiency testing results indicate the student is limited in English reading, writing, or speaking skills.

12. Native American - A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America and who maintain cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition (Texas Education Agency, 2003).

13. Returning Student - A student in Grade 9-12 who has previously dropped out of a public high school setting, but has subsequently made a decision to enroll and complete his/her studies in a public alternative educational setting. This definition was utilized for the purposes of this study and is used generically in research studies to designate students fitting this definition. This definition is not the same definition that the Texas Education Agency uses. The term ―returning student‖ in the Public Educational Information Management System (PEIMS) designates a student who returns the following semester after having been enrolled the previous semester (Roska, 2004).

14. Site-Based Decision Making Committee - A group composed of campus administrators, parents, community and business members that engages in making recommendations in decision-making activities and assists the campus principal in developing and implementing the campus improvement plan (CIP) (Texas Education Agency, 1993).

15. Site-Based Decision Making (SBDM) - A state-mandated process aimed at decentralizing the decision-making process to the local campus level by involving stakeholders such as principals, teachers, district and campus staff, students, parents, and community and local business members in a collaborative process to ensure full participation in the implementation and monitoring of school improvement strategies to increase student achievement (Texas Education Agency, 1992).

16. White - A TEA term used to categorize non-Hispanic students deemed to have origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East (TEA, 2001a).

Organization of the Study

A review of the pertinent literature applicable to this study is presented in Chapter II. The literature review canvassed both early and recent research on effective practices or intervention strategies that address both dropout prevention and recovery efforts. Information is also presented on the different types of alternative education programs available in Texas, the Texas-mandated TAAS/TAKS assessments, the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) used to determine accreditation ratings, and the importance of funding for public alternative education programs. Chapter III presents the qualitative methodology deemed appropriate for the completion of this research project. Chapter III also provides a description of the alternative education program (AEP), the selection of the study site, participant selection, and details of the data analysis. Chapters IV, V, and VI present findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future consideration for legislators and educators.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Society cannot afford to give up on people who, for whatever reasons, have dropped out of school. They should be provided with encouragement and multiple opportunities to return to school and to graduate (Lockwood & Secada, 1999, p. 7).

There has been increased interest in alternative schools and programs because of concerns among educators, policy makers, and the public about violence, weapons, and drugs on elementary and secondary school campuses. There has been an equal concern about where to send disruptive students or students who are not succeeding in regular public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). In general, students are referred to public alternative education programs (AEPs) if they are at risk of education failure because of poor grades, truancy, suspension for disruptive behavior, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with early withdrawal from school (Paglin & Fager, 1997). Early withdrawal from school for many of these students usually means that they may never finish a formal education (Finn, 1989, U. S. Department of Education, 2001, June). In most cases, students who have already dropped out but who decide to return and complete their educations do so by enrolling in a public alternative education program. These students have come to be known in the research

literature as ―returnees.‖ This term; however, should not to be confused with the definition of ―returning student‖ as used in the Texas Education Agency‘s Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) for purposes of student accountability (L. Roska, personal communication, March 2, 2004; TEA, 2000, June, 2004).

What is unknown are the characteristics of these students who drop out and then voluntarily decide to return to an alternative education program, the reasons behind their decisions to reenter, and what are the effective strategies that seem to work within alternative education programs to facilitate these returnees to complete their high school educations.

Due to a the lapse of time between the time that this study was proposed and completed, there was a need to bring more recent research literature into the foray to elucidate that there is still a need to reveal and share the valuable results of this study with other researchers in the field of education. Inclusive in this synopsis are studies that were conducted prior to my last literature review, but had not yet been made available in print or other medium.

Chapter two includes an overview of the existing literature that covers the impact of Texas state assessments on the dropout rate, how AEPs have been rated by the Texas Education Agency, the No Child Left Behind Law and its impact on the Texas accountability system, what is known about the research questions being addressed by this study, reasons for dropping out, reasons for enrolling in AEPs, the rise of AEPs, effective practices preventing drop outs, effective strategies within AEPs, disciplinary settings, AEP structures, strategies and culture, Texas AEPs,

NCLB, and adequate yearly progress, the ongoing debate about the rising academic standards, known attributes of AEP students and programs, societal impact of dropouts in Texas, AEP funding, the known prevalent themes, long term lessons, implications for future research, and a conclusion.

Impact of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills on Dropouts

To add to the public's concern about the dropout situation, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) implemented the more rigorous *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills* (TAKS) in the Spring of 2003 (TEA, 2002, November). The preliminary TAKS results indicated that more than 800,000 public school students across the state of Texas failed at least one of the state's exams in the areas of Reading, Writing, or Math. The performance gap between white and minority or poor students also widened with the latter failing at higher rates. Only 64.3 percent of the more than 2.25 million Texas school students in Grades 4 through 11 passed all subjects tested. At the secondary level, only 52 percent of sophomores passed all TAKS tests, placing many students in peril of being unable to graduate in two years. In comparison, the Spring 2002 results indicated that 85 percent of the students tested passed the *Texas Assessment of Academic Skills* (TAAS), a less challenging series of exams that had been in place since 1990 (Gutierrez, 2003, May 31; TEA, 2002, May, 2003, April, 2003, July).

In spite of the dismal baseline year results, the new TAKS assessed more grade levels, subjects, and higher-level skills and students actually did better than expected. When the

original TAAS was introduced, the scores ranged from 32 percent to 58 percent passing, while the TAKS results demonstrated results ranging from 49 percent passing in Grade 11 English, math, science, and social studies to 75 percent passing Grade 4 reading, writing and math (Gutierrez, 2003, May 31; TEA, 2003, April, 2003, July).

At the elementary level, third graders had consequences based on their TAKS scores. For the first time, in 2003, Grade 3 students were required to pass the reading TAKS to advance to the next grade level. Ninety-four percent of the 293,493 third graders initially passed the TAKS in March, while another 16,525 had a second opportunity that April to retake the test, and those still not passing had a third opportunity in July, usually after being required to attend summer school. Thus, testing for TAKS was set up so that students had three opportunities to pass the tests. A combined passing rate for Grade 3 students was not released, but a separate score for the TAKS Math demonstrated that 90 percent passed that exam. This passing rate was not so remarkable when one considered that the Grade 3 students only had to answer 52.5 percent of the questions correctly in Math and 55.6 percent of the questions in reading in order to pass (Gutierrez, 2003, May 31; TEA, 2003, April, 2003, July).

Results of the third TAKS administration were released by TEA on July 23, 2003. These results showed that 11,748 students or about four percent of the 2002-2003 third-grade class had not yet passed the reading exam. Under the *Student Success Initiative* (SSI), passed by the Texas Legislature in 1999, students who had been retained in the third grade continued to receive accelerated reading instruction designed to meet their individual needs. The promotion requirement continued for Grade 3 students during the 2003-04 school years. In addition, students in Grade 11 took the four-part exit-level exam, which they had to pass by the end of

their high school career in order to receive a diploma. In 2004-2005, Grade 5 students were required to pass the reading and math sections of TAKS to be promoted to Grade 6. This same group of students would also have to pass the reading and math TAKS in Grade 8 in order to be promoted to Grade 9 (TEA, 2002, November, 2003, July).

State officials then suspended the annual rating of schools for the 2002-2003 school year in order to have the opportunity to revamp the accountability system to account for the new test as well as the more recent federal mandates (TEA, 2002, July, 2004, March). The significance of these newly implemented Texas assessment requirements and consequences were expected to have an impact on the student dropout rate and, consequently, on the number of students who could be placed in or decide to attend an alternative education program to complete their studies. Answers as to the effectiveness of these public alternative education programs were needed to justify the continued support for programs that address the specific needs of an ever growing at-risk dropout student population. There is a need to ascertain the effectiveness of these alternative education programs for dropouts that will certainly prevail beyond the TAAS and TAKS era of state assessments.

The following literature review outlines for the reader what is currently known and understood about public alternative education programs in an effort to convey the urgency to conduct much needed research in the area of dropout recovery not only under the TAKS, but any subsequent state mandated accountability system.

Alternative Education Program Ratings

Under the existing Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) of accountability,

Texas school districts and campuses must meet specific criteria for ratings of *Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable, and Academically Unacceptable.* The exception to this AEIS system were the ratings established under the *Registered* Alternative Accountability System devised specifically to rate alternative schools that registered with the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Under this system, alternative school ratings ranged from *Commended, Acceptable, Needs Peer Review, and Not Rated.* For a side-by-side comparison of the dual accountability system that has been in place in Texas for districts and campuses see Appendix A (TEA, 2000, April, 2001, July).

Alternative education programs that chose to register with the TEA had been rated using different passing standards and additional indicators, while the students within those campuses had been required to meet the same performance standards as students attending a regular or traditional educational program. Alternative education campuses not choosing to register with the Agency had their students' TAAS and later TAKS results aggregated in with each student's home campus. In contrast, alternative education programs choosing to register were required to have their own county/district/campus (CDC) number for accountability reporting purposes. In addition, the non-registered AEPs could also attribute the individual TAAS and later TAKS testing results of students enrolled for fewer than 85 cumulative days directly back to the each student's locally assigned regular campus (TEA, 2000, April, 2001, July).

No Child Left Behind Law and the Texas Accountability System

Upon the passage of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Law of 2002 (P.L. 107-110), the Texas Education Agency quickly disbanded the department handling the Registered Alternative Education program. Personnel were assigned to new positions and a vacancy that existed for a

director of alternative education programs was never filled. Although the Agency did release the August 2003 AEIS results, it seemed that the future of the ―registered‖ alternative education program system of accountability that had once existed was now in question. For a side by side comparison of the standard Texas accountability system and the new performance requirements of NCLB, see Appendix B.

The Commissioner of Education released an initial accountability plan for 2004 and beyond. This plan put the registered alternative education program ―on hold‖ while sound accountability measures were put into place. Those alternative education campuses that were still registered with the TEA received a simple notation of ―Alternative Education‖ in place of an official AEIS rating for both the 2003 and 2004 school years. The label was used pending TEA verification of data showing that the campus was providing services to at-risk students (TEA, 2004, March).

While in prior years, there had been a shift towards local funding of alternative programs (Viadero,1999; Whitington, 2000), the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2002 (NCLB), and the subsequent state compensatory education (SCE) funding mandates, left many alternative education campuses in Texas struggling to keep their programs open unless they were mostly locally funded. Local superintendent and school board decisions about compensatory programs for at-risk students dictated justification for funding for many of these credit-recovery or drop-out recovery programs (TEA, 2001). The funding question became: Why don't we just use optional extended-year funds (OEY) to provide after-school or Saturday tutorials to address the needs of students that are academically failing, instead of offering a totally separate program at

an extra cost to the district for AEP facilities, personnel, and curriculum?

At the time, the value of districts‘ establishing alternative education programs and/or having these separate campuses ―register‖ with the Agency was under appreciated and little understood because of lack of data on the effectiveness of these programs. The literature review demonstrated that what was lacking was research-based knowledge about alternative education programs (Duke, 1978; Lange & Sletten, 2002; NCES, 2001a, 2001b; Septey, 1995).

Research Questions

The literature review addressed the areas of research that were pertinent to the three questions asked in this study.

1. What are the characteristics of the Grade 9-12 students who have dropped out and later return to school to complete their studies in a selected alternative education program?
2. What are the reasons that returning students give for making a decision to enroll in a selected alternative education program?
3. What do the students and stakeholders in a selected Texas registered alternative education program perceive as effective practices of the program that encourage students to return and complete their educations?

In order to demonstrate where this study fits into the existing literature concerning alternative education programs, I identified a comprehensive chronology of nationally recognized studies related to each of the three research questions. When possible, the researcher tied in studies carried out in the state of Texas because the department for registered public alternative education programs and the selected study site utilized in this research project were both located within this state.

Student Characteristics

In 1978, Duke attempted to study who was discontented and the reasons that they were discontented with conventional schools. The main focus of his work was an attempt to explain why contemporary alternative schools, both public and nonpublic, emerged when they did and in such numbers. Duke's defining traits of contemporary alternative schools were that they were accessible by choice rather than assignment, practiced a non-conventional approach to learning, and had a composition of students consisting primarily of white middle-class students capable of succeeding in conventional public schools. These students did not share common ethnic, religious, social, political backgrounds, or emotional problems. The students attending contemporary alternative schools at that time were described as being under motivated or discontented. At the time of Duke's study, some of the terms that had been used to pertain to educational reforms were: free schools, storefront schools, continuation schools, three Rs schools, magnet schools, mini schools, street academies, schools-without-walls, and schools-within-schools. These terms dealt with reforms outside of conventional schooling (Duke, 1978, pgs. 4-11; Kozol, 1972, 1972, March 4, 1972, December 9).

The Duke study was descriptive in nature and examined the goals, methods, and administrative organization of forty contemporary alternative schools. The study utilized data on students, parents, and teachers. Even though Duke expected to find corroboration for the generalization held at that time that contemporary alternative schools attracted competent students, it became obvious that other kinds of students were also represented. Basically, the only generalization that Duke found to apply to students in contemporary alternative schools was

that no generalization fit them at all (Duke, 1978, p. 77).

Later, Jan Harlin Ramsey‘s 1988 dissertation at East Texas State University, identified common characteristics of the dropout population in a large high school in Mesquite Independent School District (MISD). The descriptive study examined current school records, past school records, and utilized telephone interviews. The study involved 388 dropouts in grades 9-12, and obtained demographic data from school records such as: age, grade level, gender, race, high school attended, socioeconomic status, reason for special education services, and the reason given by the school for the student dropping out. A randomly selected group of fifty dropouts was then identified for a more in-depth case study investigation using a semi-structured interview technique. Phone and letter contacts were used to record data to draw conclusions pertaining to the factors related to students who have dropped out of school. The Ramsey study added to the existing discourse of the time, to the causes and consequences of dropping out, and to the characteristics of dropouts. The findings of the study were specific to the group of dropouts within the Mesquite ISD. Specifically, the dropout student population differed in their profile from the dropouts described in the literature at that time which indicated that a dropout was a sixteen year-old minority male who tended to come from a large urban area exhibiting dropout rates as high as 68 percent.

Ramsey‘s literature review indicated that a dropout came from a low socioeconomic background, had poor attendance, failing grades, and behavior problems. The existing literature revealed that a dropout also tended to come from a single parent home and that the parents had also been dropouts or had a low educational level. Ramsey‘s study; however, indicated that Mesquite ISD dropouts were Caucasian males, sixteen or seventeen years old and from ―blue-

collar‖ families. Dropouts in her study came from both single-parent families and intact families. Few dropouts had histories of previous school failure, poor attendance or behavior problems. In addition, Mesquite ISD only had a 5-7 percent dropout rate (Ramsey, 1988). Ramsey concluded her study by making some of the following recommendations for further study such as:

- that research be undertaken to determine the role of achievement motivation in school success,
- that a longitudinal study be conducted to compare at-risk students and the effects of program modification, and
- that additional research be undertaken to determine the predictability of TEAMS scores and student success.

The Ramsey study was important because it demonstrated that lack of academic achievement was not the primary cause for dropping out as had been indicated earlier by the Austin Independent School District‘s 1982 study (Austin Independent School District, 1982). It also negated poor academic performance as being the single best predictor of who drops out (Mann, 1986) or that the socioeconomic status of the family is strongly associated with dropping out (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). The Ramsey study contributed further to what was then known from previous national and longitudinal research about the characteristics of students that do dropout. Specifically, research results from previous studies indicated that dropouts tend to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and are much more likely to leave school early than are other students (Natriello, Pallas, & McDill, 1986, p. 170; Grossnickle, 1986;

Martin, 1981; Fine, 1986; Eskstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock; 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, p. 70).

A decade later, Krashen (1998) found that socioeconomic factors, time spent in the United States., the presence of print, and family factors have an impact on bilingual student dropouts. Students from wealthier families dropped out less; those who have been in the United States longer and who live in a more print-rich environment drop out less, while those who live with both parents and whose parents monitor their school work, drop out less, and that those who do not become teen parents drop out less (Krashen, 1998, p. 4). Apparently, background factors appear to be responsible for much if not all of the difference in dropout rates among different ethnic groups. When researchers control for these factors, there is little or no difference in dropout rates between Hispanics and other groups. This result is also true for those students that drop out between Grades 8 and 10 (Rumberger, 1995). This was found to also be true for those students that drop out later (Fernandez, Paulsen, & Hiranko-Nakanishi, 1989; Pirog & Magee, 1997; Rumberger, 1983; Warren, 1996; White & Kaufman, 1997). Rumberger found that ―…Black, Hispanic, and Native American students had twice the odds of dropping out compared to White students; however, after controlling for the structural characteristics of family background--particularly, socioeconomic status--the predicted odds of dropping out were no different than those for White students‖ (Rumberger, 1995, p. 605). Again, the literature showed what was known about the factors responsible for dropout rates among the different ethnic groups, but the literature did not describe the characteristics of the students who returned to school to complete their educations. Since students returning to complete their educational studies in an alternative education program have already dropped out, some of these dropout

characteristics could certainly be attributed to their situations. Yet, due to a lack of research in the area of ―returning students or returnees.‖ which of these characteristics were applicable to them remained unknown.

The value of the Ramsey study was that it contributed another perspective or description of students who were dropping out from one particular high school in a large urban area in Texas. It only makes sense that some of the students evidencing these non-typical dropout characteristics eventually did return to school to complete their studies. The Ramsey study; however, did not address the characteristics of dropouts attending alternative education schools or the reasons for their decisions to return to school and complete their educations. Even though the Ramsey study is now dated, one of her recommendations is still applicable today. There is still a need to be able to predict the outcome of state assessment scores and student success especially within the setting of an alternative education program.

Reasons for Students Dropping out

The following literature review demonstrates that the reasons given by students for dropping out are known, but this same review does not delineate any known reasons that students give for making a decision to return to school, specifically to alternative education programs.

In 1982, Thomas, Sabatino, and Sarri wrote that the most obvious reason that students drop out is to get away from school. They concluded that whatever made students feel threatened, insecure, uncomfortable, unsuccessful, alienated, or belligerent must be changed. The authors stated that, if people really wanted to do something constructive for young people who are prone to drop out, they also had to be willing to modify the traditional concepts of

secondary schools and that alternative programs could be one of the possible answers (Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982, p. 7).

In the mid-1980s, most dropouts surveyed shortly after dropping out believed that leaving school short of graduation was a poor decision. Many dropouts did return to school at some point. It was estimated that 40 percent of high school dropouts returned to the educational system and became ―returnees.‖ At the time, the success of efforts to encourage dropouts to become returnees hinged on identifying the target population of out-of-school youngsters who lacked a high school diploma, and understanding why they left school. Interventions were designed to bring young people back to school and were fashioned in light of the dropouts' previous educational histories as well as their current needs (Peng, 1985, March, p. 12). During this same time, research had shown that, of these returnees, approximately 30 percent ultimately did complete high school or receive an alternative credential thus becoming what is termed a ―returnee-completer.‖ It was also evident that students who dropped out later in their high school career were more likely to return to and complete high school than were early dropouts (Kolstad & Ownings, 1986, April).

In 1995, Coley published his policy information report, *Dreams Deferred: High School Dropouts in the United States* that identified twenty-two reasons given by students for dropping out of school as indicated through the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) follow-up of 1988 (Coley, 1995, p. 16-25; Ingels, 1988; U. S. Department of Education, 1988). Some of the reasons given by students for dropping out included the following:

- Did not like school
- Making poor grades

- Had other problems
- Could not keep up with school work
- Got a job
- Could not get along with teachers
- Felt I did not belong
- Could not keep up with a job and school at the same time
- Became a parent
- Had to support my family
- Became pregnant
- Could not get along with other students
- Was suspended
- Had to care for family
- Got married or planned to get married
- Changed schools and did not like my new school
- Was expelled
- My friends also dropped out
- Wanted to have a family
- Did not feel safe at school
- Wanted to travel
- Had a drug/alcohol problem

The Coley report also used the NELS second follow-up data to show which grades were

last attended by dropouts. Specifically, 3 percent had last attended Grade 8, 16 percent Grade 9, 30 percent Grade 10, 33 percent Grade 11, and 16 percent Grade 12, while 2 percent of surveyed students indicated ―No Grade System‖ for the school they had last attended (Coley, 1995, p. 19).

Watson (2001) found that students on the brink of dropping out were able to graduate once they enrolled in an AEP. Watson found eights factors in traditional high schools that diminished students‘ feeling of achievement, success and motivation. These factors included moving to a larger school, poor classroom management, teacher-to student interpersonal relationships academic pace, school rules, disciplinary assignments, counselor ineffectiveness, and student relationships and peer pressure. Watson also found five factors within an AEP that facilitated the students‘ growth in achievement, hope, and self-efficacy. These included self-paced mastery-based instruction, school staff, academic environment, attitude and self-efficacy, and shared power and control.

Subsequent research indicated that the same factors that influence students to drop out of a high school are the same factors that influence them to enroll in an alternative program (Olivo, 2003).

A qualitative methodological approach was used by Montemayor (2001) to find out what factors were associated with high school dropout behavior among Latino youth that had subsequently enrolled in an AEP to earn their General Equivalence Degree. He found that parents have a strong influence in the success of Hispanic youth, and that teachers and administrators impact the lives of youth in profound and unique ways, and that community participation plays a crucial role in the academic success or failure of these students. Montemayor found that these youth thrived in a non-traditional environment such as an AEP

setting that offered fewer restrictions and an enhanced caring environment by teachers and administrators.

Research on reasons for dropping out have included studies such as Butts (2003) whom found that lack of academic success is the strongest correlate of psychological and physical disengagement due to poor preparation, weak home support for academic tasks, and negative peer pressure. Traditional school programs were found to be irrelevant to students‘ current social interests, while drug abuse and pregnancy also led to student disengagement from school altogether.

Students also arrive at alternative education schools due to academic and behavioral failures within traditional high schools (Lopez, 2004). Other factors leading to dropping out include: poor home to school communication, excessive truancy, social alienation, juvenile delinquency, or simply that students are motivated to work full-time to accomplish life goals the fastest way. Lopez concluded that once students are enrolled at alternative schools they experience a more positive environment that fosters an excitement for learning. They once again view school as a congenial place to attend so they learn more in both academics and the moral education of enhanced life skills. Lopez recommended the need for a caring and loving school environment to further both educational and social change.

One particular study (Inman, 2006) showed that even though students were given the opportunity to attend an alternative drop-out or credit recovery program some students still failed to complete this program due to various other factors. The conclusions that Inman reached were that students did not understand the value of a high school diploma and that earning money, even

minimum wage, was more important than an education. The final conclusion was that each student did not have a plan for their life beyond the coming evening or weekend. Inman found that all of the students that failed to graduate from an alternative program had at least one of these misconceptions and at times, all three. A more recent study (Bae, 2008) indicated that students that do drop out do not connect the importance of high school to their futures and that they felt that the curriculum being taught was not relevant to their interests. Furthermore, students felt that teachers did not care for them and that it was easy to cut classes.

Hemzik (2006) identified three factors responsible for students feeling like they were being pushed out of traditional high schools: academic failure or poor grades, suspensions due to misbehavior, and social exclusion at the home school. At the same time, Hemzik found six factors that motivated students to enroll at alternative education programs: the structure of the AEP, caring teachers, good teacher to student relationships, a meaningful curriculum, a sense of belonging to a community, and the opportunity to construct a new identity or to make a fresh start.

Feelings of alienation can also cause students to drop out. Hall (2001) found that students reported experiencing feelings of alienation from both adults and other students, alienation from the experience of learning, and alienation from the community of school while having been enrolled in a traditional high school. Once these students transferred over to an alternative education program, they reported feeling a sense of connection with both adults and students, a sense of belonging to the community, and the enjoyment of the experience of learning. Hall concluded that factors within schools contribute to feelings of alienation in certain students and that educators in both traditional and alternative education programs need to

implement measures that ameliorate or decrease feelings of alienation for students so that dropout rates may also decrease.

Another study conducted in Boston Public Schools (PBS) by Lavan (2009) indicated that students typically left school due to such factors as failing Math and English, failing the state assessments, being retained in Grade 9, being suspended, NCLB sanctions, teachers, school, and class size, violence and other exigent issues. Three distinct groups of student leavers emerged in Lavan's study: lost ones, resistors, and under plight students. Lavan concluded that the emergence of these categories indicated that dropouts are not homogeneous and that various contributing factors impact these groups of students in different manners. Students that did leave PBS and entered AEPs reported that their experiences were positive while attending the programs, although the outcomes of doing so were varied.

Reasons for Returning Back to School: An AEP

What are the reasons that dropouts give for returning or reenrolling in a public school, specifically an alternative education program? What factors motivate these students to return to complete their educations in an alternative education setting?

Keene (2003) analyzed student perceptions to develop a more thorough understanding of motivation for dropout reentry in four adult school programs. His study recommended that schools increase vocational training programs; especially those that offer a certificate or licensure in connection with high school attendance. In addition, he recommended decreasing school and class size, developing teacher advisory programs, changing laws and policies to create and encourage open door reentry, better advertising of available short-term training

programs in community colleges and AEPs; and offering flexible scheduling inclusive of night classes, weekend classes, as well as online classes.

In 2004, Zwarych explored student, teacher, and administrator perspectives regarding student attachment in three secondary schools containing a variety of programs to serve the diverse student needs. Zwarych employed both quantitative and qualitative data and found seven factors that encouraged student attachment to the school. These were belongingness, self-esteem, friendships, teacher relationships, valuing school, involvement, and security. Students scoring high on some or all of these factors were attached to school; while, low scores on most or all factors indicated alienation or a lack of attachment to school. If a school had a philosophy of support and an emphasis on relationships then students had higher scores for both belongingness and teacher relationships. Students in specialized programs with foreign language programs or programs for academically talented students had higher scores for self-esteem and friendships. Finally, students in modified-tracked courses exhibited lower scores on many of the attachment to school factors. Zwarych acknowledged that these seven factors varied a great deal by program and by school, but recommended that administrators and school personnel take into account how to support student attachment to school.

Sometimes the systemic structures that students need to graduate from a traditional high school are not in place (Kujawa, 2006). Students are influenced by multiple factors such as individual characteristics, school climate and culture, family status and values, and the community support. Kujawa‘s study indicated that these were the four factors having the greatest influence in determining educational outcomes. She also found that the students in her

study exhibited the common characteristic of being resilient and having personal strength. This single personal or individual trait, when fostered, helped students to complete their studies.

It was evident that, even though the literature is full of studies, surveys, and statistical analysis (NCES, 2001b) for describing the characteristics of dropouts, the literature is still remiss in identifying characteristics of dropouts who decide to return and complete their educations or the reasons given by these students for specifically enrolling in a public alternative education program.

The Rise of Alternative Education Programs

Broad (1977) wrote an informative book which basically constituted a descriptive report for parents, educators, and practitioners in the field of education about the reasons for the rise in alternative schools. The book elaborated on the emphasis alternative schools favored with regard to instruction, curriculum, funding sources, and the establishment of clear school board policies within school districts that supported the alternative schools. Broad's report also gave the results of several surveys that had been carried out by national educational associations with regard to information on alternative schools. The surveys basically asked if districts offered programs, the grade levels the programs were offered, criteria used for establishing the programs, the funding sources, and the impetus behind the implementation of these programs. The report surveyed readers, talked to leaders in alternative schools around the country, and investigated and described a number of programs that were representative of how alternative schools responded to some of the central issues in American education (Broad, 1977, p. 8). One year later, Duke (1978) had the following to say about describing alternative schools:

> Before alternative schools can be explained, they must be described. Without a systematic description of the contemporary alternatives it would be difficult to understand whether the subject at hand (the alternative schools) represented a diverse body of educational experiments sharing only in their common opposition to conventional schooling or a relatively homogeneous group of schools striving to address similar problems with similar programs Should the descriptive phase of the study point to the existence of particular traits common to many or most alternative schools, it would serve as the basis for further investigation and, possibly, the discovery of unanticipated explanatory factors (Duke, 1978, p. 13).

At the time, Duke went further by citing a survey of the ERIC Current Index to Journals in Education which indicated that only a small number of systemic studies on alternative schools had been completed. Specifically, 158 articles on alternative schools appeared between January 1973 and May 1976. Only a fraction of these articles represented actual research. It was apparent to him, even at that time, that those who were interested in alternative schools could ascertain that there were problems in establishing and maintaining such enterprises and in assessing their effectiveness (Duke, 1978, p. 155).

Much later, Sanchez (1982) completed a descriptive doctoral study at Harvard University describing the six organizational subsystems of the only three existing Chicano alternative grade schools in the nation. Sanchez described their: (1) educational philosophies and goals, (2) organizational and administrative structures, (3) funding, (4) curriculum, (5) evaluation procedures, and (6) interaction with their surrounding communities. The study provided a better understanding and description of the Chicano social reform movement that flourished between the mid-1960‘s and early 1970‘s and the efforts taken to their own schools. The Sanchez study

examined the George I. Sanchez High School in Houston, Texas, Escuela de la Raza Unida in Blythe, California, and Escuela Taltelolco in Denver, Colorado. At the time, all three schools were accredited by their respective state agencies to provide their students with transferable transcripts for college entry (Sanchez, 1982, p. 65). Today only the George I. Sanchez High School in Houston exists. Many of these early Chicano schools closed when found to be in non-compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In general, the Office of Civil Rights alleged that the schools discriminated against white students (Sanchez, p. 24). The Sanchez study provided the necessary background and foundation for future studies on the subject of Chicano alternative grade schools, and shared the findings and recommendations with any individual or group interested in building a Chicano alternative school.

Even though the Sanchez study did provide a much needed description of the Chicano alternative schools, the study did not address a description of general alternative education programs; nor did the study explore effective practices within the Chicano schools themselves. Rather, the study described programs in place within the Chicano schools, but did not evaluate the effectiveness of these programs or strategies in meeting the needs of at-risk Hispanic students.

Other studies found that many students did not drop out due to school problems. Instead, some students dropped out due to economic and family considerations. For some students, the decision to drop out of school had been made in the face of less desirable alternatives. Recommendations at the time suggested that improving the completion rate for these students could be facilitated by strategies that either allowed them to stay in school while meeting their

other obligations or facilitated their later return to the educational system. Some of the strategies that were tried included cooperative arrangements that combined school with work experience or childbearing (Lotto, 1982) and programs that allowed for a more flexible use of time, such as extending 4-year programs to 5 years (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986). However, one strategy, providing part-time jobs during the school year and full-time jobs during the summer to dropouts or potential dropouts on the condition that they stay in or return to school, did not decrease the likelihood of dropping out (Borus, 1985).

The prevailing alternative education program research during this time frame posited that there were several alterable conditions under which at-risk students could succeed in achieving higher standards. These conditions are school size (Barker & Gump, 1964; Blau & Shoenherr, 1971, p. 57; Diprete, 1982; Gottfredson, 1984; Levin, 1983; Morgan & Alwin, 1980; McPartland & McDill, 1977; U. S. Department of Justice, 1980, Appendix 3), structure and content of the curriculum (Lotto, 1982), school climate (Gottfredson, 1984;), governance (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Gottfredson, 1984), system of academic awards (Cohen and Filipczak, 1971; McPartland and McDill, 1977; U. S. Department of Justice, 1980, Appendix 3, pp. 6-7), and the degree to which there is support and emphasis for achievement and intellectualism by students, teachers, and administrators (Alexander, Fennessey, McDill, & D'Amico, 1979; McDill & Rigsby, 1973). Other alterable conditions included student and parental involvement in governance or decision-making (Amenta, 1982; Duke & Seidman, 1981; Maurer, 1982; U. S. Department of Justice, 1980), peer counseling and/or tutoring (Odell, 1974; Romig, 1978; U. S. Department of Justice, 1980, Appendix 3), and the physical location of the program in the traditional school setting versus in a separate and distinct setting (Harris, Hedman, & Horning,

1983; Robbins, Mills, & Clark, 1981).

As discussed earlier, the Ramsey (1988) study made some recommendations as a result of the data analysis of the Mesquite ISD dropout population. These recommendations could be viewed as characteristics that should be inherent in programs that are effective in preventing dropouts. At the time, Ramsey made the following recommendations:

- that preventive counseling should take place with at-risk students,
- that parents should become more involved at the high school and middle school level when students are exhibiting at-risk behaviors,
- that schools should utilize parent volunteer programs, parent education programs, and parent conferences to help involve parents of the secondary students,
- that school staff should appeal to parents of at-risk students by greater efforts through communication and involvement,
- that alternative programming should be available to students who cannot master the essential elements,
- that mentorship programs for at-risk students should be established among the high school and middle school staff that address student activities and academics,
- that a dropout prevention program should be implemented by the high schools,
- that early identification of potential dropouts should serve as a needs assessment for future programming, and
- that every effort should be made to encourage dropouts to return to high school or an alternative educational program.

Ramsey made these recommendations to help ensure that these practices would be implemented in regular public education programs to prevent dropouts. Even though it makes sense that these recommendations might also be applicable to alternative education programs, the Ramsey study did not make any specific recommendations for effective practices within the scope of an alternative education program. Again, the literature was lacking in discerning the effective practices that exist within the scope of an alternative education program that would encourage dropouts to return to school and that once the students are enrolled, help them to remain and complete their educations successfully.

Effective Practices Preventing Drop Outs

In the past, the assessment of effective practices in schools, including alternative education programs, seems to be a step that has been neglected due to implementation of newer or supposedly better practices. In an introduction to Edison Trickett's book (1991), Willis D. Hawley, director of the Center for Education and Human Development Policy at the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Studies, wrote that, in 1990, the magic pill most widely prescribed to cure the ills of America's schools was ―restructuring.‖ Educators at the time seemed to be drawn to this remedy simply because restructuring seemed to encompass almost any proposal that was different from common practices. According to Hawley, what ultimately happened was that restructuring proposals included two changes in the way most public schools have been organized. The first of these was the implementation of site-based decision making in an effort to decentralize key decisions concerning curriculum, teaching strategies, and the day-to-day scheduling of the school day. Restructuring of this kind had an effect on school districts and individual school operations. The second change included empowering teachers with a greater

role in decision-making within schools. In seeking solutions to complex problems, advocates of restructuring often sought answers in seemingly successful practices in different fields or in exceptions to the rules. Hawley cited two examples of these types of misguided reforms such as modeling teacher preparation programs after successful strategies in other professions and building voucher plan reforms, sometimes pointing to the successes of parochial schools serving poor children (Trickett, 1991, p. vii).

These types of reform strategies obviously took out of context the examples they had been drawn from and failed to recognize that the conditions that applied to these models did not generally apply to other venues and that the successes of the activities within the models could have negative effects when implemented elsewhere. Secondly, researchers discounted the possibility that the success of a program could be due more to the extraordinary people or conditions involved than to the program‘s characteristics. In addition, there was a failure to recognize that there could be a limited number or supply of the extraordinary people that are drawn by a program‘s characteristics. According to Hawley, reformers sometimes not only took analogies out of context and over generalized from exceptional successes, they failed to ask whether the proposals they were making had been previously tried (Trickett, 1991, p. vii).

Effective Strategies Within AEPs

Neumann (1994, March) surmised that, while there was no typical model of an alternative school, but that there appeared to be some common structures and processes that contributed to the successes these schools had experienced. After attending a national conference on alternative schools, Neumann listed the descriptions of successful program

characteristics as voiced by educators attending the conference sessions. Among the common structures and processes deemed to contribute to successes of alternative education programs were collaborative site-based management, small school size, small class size, extended roles for teachers that included student counseling and guidance, cooperative roles for students, voluntary membership, student involvement in governance, and absence or minimization of tracking, ability grouping, and other forms of labeling (Neumann, 1994, March, p. 548).

Later, Montecel (1997, August) urged that effective strategies identified by the Intercultural Development and Research Association (IDRA) be taken into account to help reverse the trend of high dropout rates at the secondary levels, especially for the Hispanic student population. Effective school program strategies that have been identified by IDRA in its 24 years of experience in research and dropout prevention include the following:

- Strategies that impact the *triad* of school, family and community, and student.
- Strategies based on the understanding of the *heterogeneity* of dropouts and the need for local adaptation of intervention models.
- Strategies inclusive of informed public policy based on the utilization of effective data bases and research.
- Strategies based on incorporating ways of increasing the *capacity* of schools, family and community, and students to produce results.
- Strategies providing equity in resources.
- Strategies that include mechanisms that hold the schools *accountable* for results.
- Strategies that allow for *diffusion* of successful approaches and the development of action

networks.

Once a student has been removed to an alternative education program or has voluntarily enrolled in such a program, whether they are able to return or transfer back to a regular school campus or successfully graduate from an alternative school program may depend in part on the quality of the education and services they receive. Some of the factors that have been identified as beneficial to students in an alternative education environment for at-risk students included: dedicated and well-trained staff, effective curriculum, and a variety of support services provided through an array of agencies in collaboration with the school (Quinn & Rutherford, 1998).

Research on alternative education programs consists of a national study of public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of educational failure. This national study, conducted in 2001, titled ―District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs,‖ was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) through its Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), and included a sample of 1,534 public school districts that had public alternative schools and programs that served students at risk of educational failure. This survey was conducted to provide data on topics related to the availability of public alternative education schools and programs, enrollment, staffing, and services for at-risk students. As a result of this survey, the following information about staffing in alternative education programs became known:

- Eighty-six percent of districts hired teachers to specifically teach in alternative schools or programs for at-risk students.
- Forty-nine percent of districts transferred teachers by choice or voluntarily from regular programs into one of these programs.

- Ten-percent of districts assigned teachers involuntarily to positions in programs for at-risk students.

One of the most valuable results of the survey revealed that districts had a wide variety of services and practices for alternative education programs that were supported by district policy. Some of the survey revelations included:

- Ninety-one percent of the districts had curricula leading toward a regular high school diploma.
- Eighty-seven percent of the districts provided academic counseling.
- Eighty-five percent of districts required smaller class size than regular schools.
- Eighty-four percent of the districts required remedial instruction.
- Eighty-three percent of the districts provided opportunities for self-paced instruction.
- Seventy-nine percent of the districts provided crisis/behavioral intervention.
- Seventy-nine percent provided career counseling.

Conversely, some of the elements found less often in school districts providing public alternative education programs for at-risk students included the following:

- Only 29 percent of the districts required an extended school day or school year.
- Only 26 percent of the districts had security personnel on site.
- Only 25 percent of the districts required evening or weekend classes.

The survey also helped to make a determination on what types of collaborative rapport the districts had with other community entities that might also be involved with at-risk students. In particular, the survey revealed that:

- Eighty-four percent of the districts reported collaboration with the juvenile justice system.
- Seventy-five percent of the districts collaborated with community mental health agencies.
- Seventy-percent of the districts collaborated with the police or sheriff's departments.
- Sixty-nine percent collaborated with child protective services.
- Twenty-three percent of the districts also collaborated with parks and recreation departments (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2003, pgs. 1- 5; U. S. Department of Education, NCES, 2001).

One study (Christian, 2003) found that there was no statistical significance between participation in a credit recovery program, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, TAKS Reading/Language Arts/Math results and advancing from Grade 9 to Grade 10. So this particular study was inconclusive as to whether an AEP program improved the academic success for high school freshmen as measured by their being able to advance from one grade level to the next.

A descriptive case study in Mississippi sought to investigate the effectiveness of one evening AEP in the areas of student academic achievement, attendance and behavior (Walker, 2004). The study used a variety of both quantitative and qualitative research methods to determine student and teacher perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of students attending this evening AEP. Students voiced that they had more opportunities to hold a job and had more individualized attention, but the disadvantages were that they missed their high school friends and could not participate in day school activities. Teachers verified that an advantage for

students included the opportunities for them to hold day jobs, attend smaller classes, had individualized instruction and better use of the existing space. However, teachers stated that some students lacked transportation, couldn't participate in extracurricular activities, and that there was a negative impact on student family life. Walker concluded that the advantages of students attending outweighed the disadvantages by a wide margin because both student academic achievement and behavior improved, while attendance results were mixed.

A study by Harris (2005) explored whether at-risk senior student graduation rates, attendance rates and passing rates on the Exit Level TAAS differed between a traditional high school and an alternative education program. Harris used the independent variables of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. His general conclusion was that the AEP in his study provided a greater opportunity for success of at-risk students because it had a 100% graduation rate.

In 2006, Gilson sought to identify characteristics of effective alternative high schools in Iowa. He used student retention and grade completion as a measure of alternative program effectiveness. His study reached the following conclusions: teacher lengths of service and administrator lengths of service were not positively related to a student's graduate completion rate; while, the size of a school did not have a negative relationship to either graduate completion or student retention. Surprisingly, smaller schools were found to have a negative relationship that was statistically significant when compared to student retention. Gilson concluded that none of the following: teacher and student choice, the autonomous nature of alternative programs, or the learning community characteristics of discovery learning and simulation were positively related to graduate completion or student retention. Overall, Gilson could not support his

hypothesis that any one characteristic was instrumental in improving student retention or graduate completion rates.

Later a study by Duggan (2007) showed that a relationship exists between students' perceptions of school culture and school effectiveness. Duggan determined that school culture factors that make a difference within an AEP are related to safety, school size, expanded teacher roles, positive relationships, support services, and academic innovation. The last factor was considered as being the most significant single important independent variable describing effective alternative schools. Other studies, such as Coveney (2009) found that alterable variables such as having social goals, motivation, and resiliency fostered through interventions and other strategies led to students having more specific and realistic social goals as compared to students who dropped out.

The literature review presented thus far has provided a rich historical description of intervention strategies that have been implemented over time in an effort to prevent students from dropping out. The studies and surveys; however, did not address which of these specific strategies attract or retain at-risk students who have already dropped out from a public educational system to enroll and remain in an Exemplary State of Texas public alternative education program. What was specifically lacking was the viewpoint or voices of the various stakeholders within these public alternative education programs as to what they considered to be effective program strategies.

The Gold and Mann Study: A Disciplinary Setting

In 1984, Gold and Mann published a study conducted between 1977-1979, titled,

Expelled to a Friendlier Place. The study explored the possibility that certain kinds of alternative schools would reduce the delinquent behavior of their students significantly, regardless of other influences in their lives. The study found little difference between respondents who volunteered for the alternative programs, respondents who were referred to alternative programs, and the comparison respondents. The comparison respondents or control group were students referred to an alternative education program, but instead were selected at random to remain on their home campus. The referrals were mainly for disruptive behavior, repeated or serious violation of school rules, or for chronic truancy (Gold & Mann, 1984, p. 74).

The Gold and Mann study focused on three questions. First, did the alternative schools work? Did they reduce the disruptive and delinquent behavior of their students relative to the students in the comparison group who remained in the conventional program? The findings showed that the alternative schools worked in the sense that their students showed a marked statistically reliable decline in their disruptive behavior at school by the time most of them returned to their conventional schools (Gold & Mann, 1984, p. 99). The second question asked to what social psychological processes was the effectiveness of the programs attributable. What ingredients of the program and what of students' psychological responses to them were responsible for producing change? The findings provided strong support for most of the study's posited theory that delinquent behavior was a defense against the external realities that threatened a young person's self-esteem. That delinquent behavior was defensive in that it provided a way of avoiding, neutralizing, or counteracting situations that endangered self-esteem. Delinquent behavior was assumed to offer the student experiences that provided a form of self-enhancement. The theory assumed that a derogated self-image was naturally aversive and

that it would set in motion forces to dispel it. Delinquent behavior was interpreted as a manifestation of these forces. The study found that the kinds of attitudes students had about themselves and toward school were indeed associated with change; however, the data did not support the theory with regards to the unconscious elements of self-esteem.

Finally, the third question of the study tried to determine under what special conditions, if any, did the programs prove effective, proving the theory of the study valid. This part of the research concerned itself with the differences among the students when they entered the alternative programs that may have enhanced or diminished the effect of the programs. The findings determined that the students who showed strong signs of anxiety and depression were not enduringly affected by the alternative schools. The programs enduring effectiveness was limited to those students who, according to the researchers‘ theory, were successfully using disruption delinquency to defend against psychic pain. The alternative schools did not succeed with those students whose delinquency upon entrance did not appear to help them avoid manifestation of anxiety and depression. Instead, the alternative programs were particularly effective with those less anxious and depressed students who were most delinquent and disruptive at the onset (Gold & Mann, 1984, p. 100).

The Gold and Mann study used the following demographics: age, grade point average, sex, expulsion, suspensions, race, level of education, and whether the student was living with both parents. The study also included the following measures: assessments of conscious and unconscious self-esteem, anxiety, depression, attitudes toward school, commitment to the student role, and self-reported delinquent behavior (Gold & Mann, 1984, p. 88-92).

Even though the findings of the Gold and Mann study were groundbreaking in the field of alternative education research, the study dealt exclusively with the effectiveness of alternative education programs that address students‘ disruptive and delinquent behaviors. These types of alternative schools are known as a *disciplinary alternative education program* (DAEPs). Yet, even Texans lack knowledge about the effectiveness of these types of alternative education programs, too. Septey states:

> Although the alternative education movement continues to grow, researchers do not agree about the effectiveness of these programs. Effective alternative programs are needed for expelled and at-risk students, but effective safety and violence prevention programs must be implemented at the same time in order to achieve a lasting reduction in juvenile crime. However, just because school districts are required by law to provide a separate alternative setting to which students removed from class may be sent, it does not necessarily mean that these ―alternative setting‖ will eventually succeed. In order to be successful, alternative programs need to be properly implemented, correctly structured and targeting specific student populations. The real danger to the current alternative school system is these schools can be easily used as dumping grounds for students who are difficult to deal with, or because some teachers simply do not have the necessary skills to motivate, discipline, educate or the ability to relate to students with different learning abilities, styles and personal attributes (Septey, 1995, p. 89-90).

The study of both disciplinary and credit recovery alternative education programs needs to be advanced in order to fully understand the impact that both of these programs have on curbing the tide of Texas dropouts.

AEP Structures, Strategies & Culture

One comparative study (Cook, 2003) concluded that the differences between traditional high schools and alternative education programs was that alternative schools did everything within limits to keep students attending and interested in academic learning and in improving the behaviors necessary to complete the required credits to earn an approved diploma. In addition, the study found that alternative educational settings were more flexible and permissive of the extension of the logic and actions that govern the organization, pedagogy, and curriculum of traditional high schools.

One descriptive case study (Labyer, 2004) found two rural AEP schools in Southwest Oklahoma that employed strong counseling programs providing a combination of academic, group, individual, and art therapy counseling. In addition, each academy provided a self-paced, ability level and an individualized instructional environment that fostered success for disengaged students.

Shbeer (2004) studied the effects of two instructional strategies: self-paced text-based instruction (TBI) and self-paced computer-based instruction (CBI) and gender on students‘ motivation for schooling, performance-based self-concept, reference-based self-concept, sense of control over performance, instructional mastery, and attitudes toward computers in an alternative high school in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area. Shbeer found that male students scored higher than females in the CBI, but females scored higher in the TBI. Shbeer concluded that the

alternative school‘s choice of instructional strategies had a positive influence on students‘ attitude and perceptions.

Learning communities in AEPs were examined through the eyes of students by Schussler (2002) and four distinctive features of the learning environment emerged. Specifically, these features included: academics, caring, freedom/responsibility/choice, and core values. In addition, Shussler found that opportunities for student success prevailed through flexible avenues, and that the perception that students were respected was evident throughout these features and resulted in students‘ positive attitude toward their school experiences as well as their continued attendance in school. Even though the learning community construct includes cognitive, affective, and ideological dimensions, and the features that Schussler found did not perfectly align with this construct, the fluidity of the construct found allowed for additional features that corresponded to the school‘s ideology.

Thurston (2004) found that the practice of community within an AEP led to the development of an environment that is engaging and empowering for the student. This practice led to the development of a professional learning community. Thurston believed that the ultimate result of practicing community in the classroom could be the creation of an organization where students and staff are empowered toward developing learning styles and strategies that serve to make the school experience relevant to the learner‘s day-to-day life experiences.

Major findings of a study conducted by Toyryla (2003) included the importance of small school size because these fostered important characteristics and factors such as a positive and caring environment, personal attention for students, formation of trusting connections with adults, relationships among students and lack of conflict to make a calm campus, involvement in

school and acceptance of all students. Students assumed personal control and responsibility for success, specific programs kept students in school, while a school structure employing self-paced work independent of other students was also important.

One study (Brussow, 2007) found that students are helped to graduate through organizational cultures that structure smaller learning environments such as the size of the school and the size of the classes. In addition, Brussow found that the positive helping attitude of administrators, teachers, and staff helped students to complete their studies.

At the same time, Jones (2006) found that at-risk students attending an AEP reported that the program was willing to change class schedules to accommodate their home and/or work obligations and that the students viewed the alternative school staff and faculty as being friendly. At-risk students in traditional high schools had negative perceptions of their mainstream experience including the witnessing of fights and being aware that other students were using drugs and alcohol. They also felt less connected to the mainstream school as they progressed through the grade levels. Jones concluded that awareness of the perceptions of at-risk students in mainstream programs needed to increase so that these could be addressed; while encouraging the continued support of students attending alternative programs. Cary (2009) found that alternative education schools which adopted a 90% mandatory attendance rate led to an increase in credits earned, therefore leading to an increase in graduation rate.

A comparative analysis (Moger, 2010) between a traditional high school, an AEP, and a DAEP in the same central Texas school district revealed that student Math and Reading TAKS scores increased the second year that students were in attendance at all three of these educational

settings. Students attending traditional high schools had higher attendance rates than students attending either of the alternative schools. All students that exhibited three or more at-risk indicators accrued credits at a slower rate and were not likely to graduate in four years or pass the Math TAKs test, yet they were able to pass the Reading TAKS test. Surprisingly, Moger found that students with three or more at-risk indicators attending a school of choice or AEP tended to have higher GPAs when compared to students attending either a traditional or DAEP campus.

Ryan (2009) used data from the large-scale nationally representative 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Public School Survey to determine which of the five constructs of school inputs, school structures, classroom structures, student support, and program rigor and relevance were predictors for graduation rate, percent attendance at 2-year college, percent attendance at 4-year college, and average daily attendance at public alternative high schools for at-risk students. She found that classroom structures and processes were found to be associated with graduation rate.

Texas AEPs, NCLB, and Adequate Yearly Progress

Today in Texas there is a system of alternative schools that is comprised of charter schools or schools of choice. This includes the disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) for the removal of unruly students from the classroom, while Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEPs) handle the expulsion of students from public schools or serve students that are court-ordered to attend such a facility. There is also the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) which is in charge of juvenile incarceration facilities. Finally, there are public alternative education programs (AEPs) that serve as credit recovery programs for returning students or students choosing to transfer to such an educational setting when they have

been unsuccessful in completing a regular or traditional high school program.

In the spirit of the NCLB, alternative education programs must also addresses student academic achievement through state assessments. President George W. Bush stated:

> Accountability is an exercise in hope. When we raise academic standards, children raise their academic sights. When children are regularly tested, teachers know where and how to improve. When scores are known to parents, parents are empowered to push for change. When accountability for our schools is real, the results for our children are real (U. S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 2)

The NCLB law further stipulated that schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) where student achievement was judged relative to annual measurable objectives to determine if the school or local education agency (LEA) made AYP. The school and each subgroup of students must meet one of two criteria: meet the annual objective or decrease the percent of students who are not proficient by 10 percent and make progress on another indicator. The method for calculating AYP ensures that schools and districts are focused on the accountability goal of having all students reach the proficient level. The AYP components are *test performance* as evidenced by the percentage of students considered to be proficient on each of the Reading/Language Arts and mathematics tests. A second component is *student participation* in each of these tests. A third component is the *graduation rate* and *one other indicator*. Schools and districts are held accountable for testing results through analysis of whether all students, all racial/ethnic groups, all economically disadvantaged students, all students with disabilities, and all students of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) reach annual performance targets (U. S. Department of Education, 2002a, October, p. 11-13).

Raising the Academic Standards: The Ongoing Debate

The federal mandates of the NCLB have reinvigorated the debate over the effects of mandating higher academic standards and the educational results that these mandates will have on at-risk students. This debate is not new. Early studies (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986, April) compared changes in SAT and ACT test scores with the changes in graduation rates across several states and found that there was a moderate negative weighted correlation of (-.26) between the change in test performance, from 1982 to 1985, and the change in the graduation rate, from 1992 to 1984. Specifically, states gaining more in test scores tended to improve their graduation rates less; those states improving their graduation rates more tended to show a smaller increase in test scores than other states. Even though this study was hardly conclusive, it suggested that, at the state level, it is considerably easier to raise test scores or to raise graduation rates than it is to raise both.

Some researchers also felt that if academic standards were raised and students were not provided substantial additional help to attain them, that it seemed reasonable to expect that at-risk students, those socially and academically disadvantaged, would be more likely than ever to experience frustration and failure. These researchers felt that the results of higher standards would be absenteeism, truancy, school-related behavior problems, and dropping out. In addition, they voiced their concern that movements to increase standards offered unique opportunities to consider ways in which schools could be modified to increase the probability that at-risk students would be able to meet the new standards. The researchers felt that it would do little good to raise standards in theory and on paper if those in the field of education could not ensure that students would actually achieve at these new levels (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986, p. 11-12, 1986,

April).

Finally, these researchers also stated that higher state and federal mandated standards for students were also indicative of greater costs to the nation through increased dropout rates and the associated educational costs. They recommended that, when higher standards are mandated, state and federal governments make serious attempts to identify the major features of secondary schools that can be altered to create conditions more conducive to the success of at-risk students and provide for additional resources to make such alterations (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986, p. 16).

A later study, conducted by the Texas Education Agency's Office of Policy Planning and Evaluation, presented findings from a five-year study about the impact of educational reform on students at risk of school failure or dropping out. The study focused on five specific policies that were part of a larger education reform movement that had begun in Texas in 1983. The specific policies studied were the increased graduation requirements, the exit-level competency test for graduation, restrictions on participation in extracurricular activities, (―no pass/no play‖ policy), the attendance policy limiting the number of absences allowed in order to receive credit, and the driver's license law requiring proof of school enrollment to obtain a driver's license. The study found that, while these policies had been well received by school staff, the implementation and impact of the specific reform policies were less than positive (TEA, 1994, March, p. 1).

One of the concerns voiced by the study respondents was that the state at-risk criteria, used in conjunction with local criteria, was resulting in the identification of large numbers of students at-risk. However, the researchers found that many of the students in the study who had

dropped out had not been identified or provided services before dropping out. A second concern among the respondents was their perception that the introduction of the new policies seemed to have a differential impact on students identified at risk and other students by widening existing differences without appropriate support. The executive summary reiterates the following:

> Policy outcomes cannot be evaluated independent of either the way the policies are implemented or the interventions provided for students. School districts are required to provide academic options and services to students identified as being at risk in their current situation. The types of services provided may include alternative education programs, retention, counseling peer tutoring, or referral to service providers outside the school (TEA, 1994, March, p. 1).

The study suggested that the types of interventions offered to students identified and categorized as being at-risk could be a mediating factor on the impact that educational reform policies have on this population. The study stated that up to this point, ―research shows that it is extremely difficult for state-level policy to change practice at the local level (Texas Education Agency, 1994, March, p. 1). The study revealed that there was variability in both the definition and implementation of the reforms, as well as the types of interventions provided by the eight high schools that participated in the research project. The following recommendations were made to help address the two overriding concerns of the study respondents: the process of identifying students at risk and the differential impact that the new policies were perceived to have on at risk students by making demands on them without the appropriate support. They were as follows:

- Continue to analyze the definition of students at risk to improve its usefulness in directing

limited education resources.

- Provide school districts greater discretion in directing resources and services to students by making the state at-risk criteria optional.
- Continue to provide technical support and training to school district staff in effective at-risk identification and exiting practices.
- Continue to closely monitor the differential impact of state-level policies on students at risk versus other students.
- Continue to emphasize remedial and compensatory programs that accelerate instruction.

Specific findings of the study with regard to the implementation of the new policies found that simply raising graduation standards at the state level did not improve student achievement at the local level unless these new academic standards were planned in conjunction with additional academic and related services. Students at risk were often unable to pass the more difficult courses or transferred to below-level courses. Secondly, the study found that students involved in school-related activities, inclusive of doing homework, had higher grades and were less likely to drop out of school than students not involved in these activities. Next, educators were evenly divided over attendance policies: those believing the policies increased the likelihood of students dropping out, those believing they decreased the likelihood, and those remaining neutral. The study found that losing credit toward the end of high school was more detrimental to students in the study than losing credit early in high school. In addition, the study found that educators took the introduction of statewide testing as something positive by helping to raise standards, helping teachers to assess students‘ needs, and by helping to deliver

remediation services to students performing below grade level. The study also indicated that students who failed the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) or TAAS were more likely to drop out than were students who did not fail. Finally, the study was inconclusive on the impact that the driver's license law had on school completion (TEA, 1994, March, pgs. 4-5). Two of the policy-specific recommendations of the study were to:

- Develop flexible and locally appropriate means of recovering credit for students with excessive absences, emphasizing learning outcomes and recuperating work as opposed to making up the time lost.
- Provide longer implementation periods for policy initiatives that have student consequences such as eligibility to receive a diploma, and incorporate institutional accountability measures into the Academic Excellence Indicators System (AEIS) and performance-based accreditation process before holding students accountable for achieving outcomes.

Some of the general recommendations not directly related to the policies under study, but resulting from the findings of the study were to:

- Examine the multiple roles of counselors and identify duties that may interfere with the time needed to provide developmentally appropriate counseling services to students.
- Link instructional services with support services such as counseling, transportation, health services, day care, and tutoring for students at risk of dropping out of school (TEA, 1994, March, p. 3).

The literature review demonstrates that the impact that new reform policies are expected

to have on at-risk students is an area that definitely needs further substantiation through continued research. What is obviously lacking in the research is a clear understanding of what is happening with the academic achievement of students who have already dropped out of public school and have subsequently returned to or enrolled in a credit recovery type of alternative program to complete their education. Are they really achieving or making progress towards graduation once they return to an alternative education school? If this is the case, then what are the successful strategies within these programs that are helping these students to succeed?

Known Attributes of AEP Students & Programs

In 2002, Jarrat's phenomenological account of the perceptions and attributions of alternative high school students provided data that revealed three themes: students took ownership for their successes and failures after they felt that a teacher or some other adult at the AEP had an interest in their academic achievement, that students had an innate perception of their ability and that this self-perception was difficult to change, and that students who were experiencing academic success exhibited a functional attributional style where effort was valued higher than ability. The study found that these attributions are set early in a student's school years and influence the way a student approaches learning, but that these can be influenced by teacher-student relationships and teaching strategies. Jarrat recommended that school practitioners become more knowledgeable of AEP students as individuals with unusual and/or difficult life circumstances, which affect their academic endeavors.

Binti (2002) found that one important feature of alternative education programs in Illinois was that there existed better student-teacher interaction than in regular schools. This was the

most important factor that distinguished alternative education from conventional schools. Other findings in Binti's research indicated that students performed better in academics and behavior and they were found to be happier at alternative schools. Student success was measured in higher academic achievements, improved attendance, and better attitudes and behavior.

Even though some attributes of alternative education programs and students are known, there is a lack of research in the area of attributes specific to a Texas alternative program rated as *Exemplary* on the Texas state assessment system.

Societal Impact of Dropouts in Texas

A report from the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts stated that ―Dropouts have a significant effect on the state's economy as well as the students themselves‖ (Strayhorn, 2003, January). The comptroller's report acknowledged that the method Texas used to report dropouts had obscured the state's dropout problem and that the Agency should conform to national standards for dropout reporting and should receive additional oversight for its dropout data collection and reporting. The method used by Texas to report dropouts raised legislative and public concern over the loss of federal grants for some schools districts. In addition, the report conceded that neither TEA nor most local school districts thoroughly evaluated the effectiveness of compensatory education programs targeting students at-risk of dropping out of school. The comptroller recommended that TEA and local districts evaluate these compensatory programs (Strayhorn, 2003, January). There was already an increasing concern that the dropout situation would not only decrease the state's future tax revenues, but the state's ability to attract new businesses (Dallas Commission on Children and Youth, 2000, April).

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), a nonprofit education

advocacy group, estimated the cumulative economic impact of Texas School dropouts from 1987-88 to 2001-02 to be $488 billion in lost wages, decreased revenues, and increases in job training, welfare, unemployment, and incarceration costs (IDRA, 2002, October). These staggering financial losses could not continue if Texas was to remain economically healthy (Texas Comptroller for Public Accounts, 2002).

Later, a study conducted by the University of Texas at El Paso examined the relationship between education and earnings at the county level. The study showed that lower dropout rates result in an improved local economy, especially in the border counties in the Rio Grande Valley. The largest potential gain was found in Starr County, where a reduction in dropouts resulted in an annual increase of $5,760 annually per individual. The study concluded that, if this county could increase its graduation rate to match the state average, it would more than double its per capita income, producing a total countywide gain of more than $210 million per year (Fullerton, 2001).

The dropout reporting system in Texas went through a period of change and the Texas Education Agency experienced reorganization as a result of legislation at both the federal and state levels. Implementation of the TAKS, passage of the NCLB law, and an extreme reduction-in-force at the Agency took place over the summer of 2003, due to a depressed state economy. As mentioned previously in the literature review, the office handling the registered alternative education program consisted of some of the first Agency personnel who were reassigned to other departments or laid off. These actions at the Agency left this department without any available staff and an existing vacancy for the position of Alternative Education Program Director.

Nonetheless, the Agency was busy implementing the TAKS and revising its accountability system known as the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) (TEA, 2004, March). The latter half of 2003 was spent on these implementations and revisions, including revising definitions and data standards for dropout and school completion rates. The assumption was made that a longitudinal high school completion or graduation rates, inclusive of Grades 9-12 would become an indicator in the state's accountability system for school districts. Policymakers needed accurate dropout information to develop effective dropout intervention and recovery programs (TEA, 2002, Summer, 2003, April). In order to develop effective dropout prevention programs, inclusive of alternative education programs, funding must be provided to school districts from both federal and state funding sources.

Alternative Education Program Funding

The 2001-2002 State of Texas allotment for students at-risk of dropping out totaled more than $1 billion (TEA, 2002a) Under the Texas school finance formulas, state compensatory education or ―accelerated instruction provided extra funding for programs that serve students at-risk of dropping out of school and those that are academically ―behind‖ or economically disadvantaged (Appendix C). Chapters 29 and 42 of the Texas Education Code indicated that state compensatory education funds were to be spent on supplemental programs and services to eliminate the performance gap, as measured by state testing, between students at-risk of dropping out and all other students.

In addition, state compensatory funds aimed to reduce the difference in dropout rates between these two student groups and to provide ―accelerated instructional services‖ to at-risk students to help them perform at grade level. Furthermore, state compensatory education funds

were intended to support Federal Title I programs for students on campuses where at least half of the students are from low income families which are eligible for federal free and reduced-price lunch programs. The total Federal Title I funding for the 2001-2002 school year was more than $850 million (Legislative Budget Board, 2002, June). These federal funds were to be used for ―supplemental educational services for disadvantaged children.‖ Finally, state compensatory funds were also intended to support alternative education programs (Strayhorn, 2003, October; TEA, 2001).

At the national level, the School Dropout Prevention Program was authorized as Title I, Part H of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.* The purpose of this funding program was to support school dropout prevention and reentry activities to raise academic achievement levels by providing grants that challenged all children to attain their highest academic potential and ensured that all students were provided these opportunities through school-wide programs proven effective in school dropout prevention and reentry. Schools that received grant assistance served students in Grades 6-12 and had dropout rates that exceeded the state average. Funds could also be used in middle or junior high schools that fed into the high schools. Funded activities had to be effective, sustainable, and delivered through coordinated programs. Specifically, these programs or projects were required to implement scientifically based, sustainable, and widely replicated strategies (U. S. Department of Education, 2002b, October) such as:

- Professional development;
- Purchase of curriculum materials;

- Release time for professional development activities;
- Planning and research;
- Remedial education;
- Reduction in pupil-to-teacher ratios;
- Efforts to help students to meet state student academic achievement standards;
- Counseling and mentoring for at-risk students;
- Implementation of comprehensive school reform models, such as creating smaller learning communities; and
- School reentry activities.

Again, the emphasis behind these activities was that they must rely upon strategies that are scientifically based, widely replicable, and sustainable. These strategies may include the following:

- Early intervention programs designed to identify at-risk students;
- Programs serving at-risk students, including racial and ethnic minorities and pregnant and parenting teenagers, designed to prevent these students from dropping out of school;
- Programs to identify youth who have already dropped out of school and encourage them to reenter school and complete their secondary education; and
- Approaches such as breaking larger schools into smaller learning communities and other comprehensive reform approaches, creating alternative school programs, and developing clear linkages from schools to career skills and

employment.

In fiscal year 2001, approximately $10 million dollars were made available for use in school-year 2002. State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational (LEAs) were eligible to apply directly to the U. S. Department of Education for 3-year grants. In order to qualify, the applicants were required to use the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) annual (event) dropout rate calculation (U. S. Department of Education, 2002, September).

A narrative study by Yates (2005) suggested that AEP programs were not supported by central school district administration, nor given the tools and resources they needed to do their work. However, teachers and students interacted in a positive, caring, and supportive family-style school environment, and they resisted negative perceptions of AEPs and stereotypes about learning. Yet, both teachers and staff were creative in their approach to serving the needs of their students by ―dumpster diving‖ or breaking the rules, if necessary, to give the students the best education possible. Yates recommended that educators make more student-centered, relationship-centered instructional decisions.

As with most programs, funding has been a pertinent factor for the addition of or lack thereof for programs and activities that may or would otherwise be considered to be effective program practices within the scope of a public alternative education program (Whitington, 2000).

Prevalent Themes

The following section reviews some of the prevalent themes found within the literature about alternative education programs. Specifically, these prevailing themes indicate that alternative schools are more successful when they meet students‘ needs in by establishing caring

relationships, fostering clear communication styles, staffing the school with competent school leadership or principals, or when these alternative programs have strong district support.

Caring Relationships

Niccola (2004) examined the relationship between at risk students‘ perceptions of teacher caring and their self-reported behavior. Specifically, the results showed that these two are not significantly related. However, the students‘ descriptions of what they consider to be effective care-giving were consistent with the prevailing literature at the time (Wentzel, 1997; Noddings, 1992; Bandura, 1986; Baumrind, 1971). Basically, students saw teachers as being caring if they had high expectations of them.

Another study by Krueger (2001) found that students attending an alternative education program identified two major characteristics of friendly teachers as those who allowed them to call them by their first names and those deemed to be nice because they took the time to explain the lessons. In addition, to these top two themes, the students also cited other characteristics of friendly teachers as those that were helpful, and took the time to talk to them about life, caring, and being nice.

Along, these same lines, Bowcutt (2004) found that teacher vulnerability to enhance development of caring relationships proved to be beneficial to improved student teacher relationships and that this factor increased the students‘ potential for learning. Teacher vulnerability was defined as the ability or willingness to disclose, discuss, admit, and apologize with regard to personal issues. This vulnerability was observed to manifest itself through teachers‘ openness about themselves as people. Bowcutt also observed pedagogical vulnerability

or the willingness of teachers to listen and respond to the needs, desires and influences of the students with regard to their interests.

Retention of at-risk alternative education students improved when teachers were seen as caring by students (Cary, 2007). Cary found that if teachers exhibited fairness, a sense of humor, creativity, a positive attitude, preparation, respect, high expectations, compassion, a personal touch, and a sense of belonging for students that they would tend to stay engaged in school. Cary also found that non-caring themes as identified by students included disrespect towards students, negative attitudes, show of favoritism, impatience, undervaluing students by not taking the time to explain the materials, along with teacher disengagement led to student-teacher relationships that did not foster school engagement for alternative education students.

What supports engagement and connectedness for AEP students? According to Lohmann (2009) AEP schools must have a clear purpose for the defined population that they serve. The AEP must also have caring, respectful, and reciprocal relationships that are an essential component of supporting students‘ renewed relationships to learning and schooling. Students and adults within an AEP must be provided with opportunities for human to human connection where both adults and youth benefit from flexible roles. Another finding in Lohmann‘s study is that the concept of ―easy‖ does not necessarily mean simple, but rather it describes the participants‘ experience within an environment that supports increased engagement, connectedness, and success. A fifth finding was that high expectations and high support cannot be mutually exclusive, though the two can be difficult to maintain equally given the external demands or pressures on schools and the internal student needs.

A good example of the relationships that sometimes need to be fostered within an AEP is one done by Shanok (2007) who used a mixed methods study to explore the transition to motherhood among pregnant and newly parenting inner city teenagers in a public alternative school. Here study strived towards gaining a first-hand or ―insider‖ perspective (Rains, Davies, & McKinnon, 1998). Shanok‘s results showed that even though the teen moms did not plan to have a baby, a large majority was pleased and open about discovering that they were pregnant. What followed was a heightened sense of purpose along with increased health and safety-conscious behaviors. Many of the teen moms did experience both public and familial alienation. Subsequently, some of the teens‘ mothers and other female mentors became central in their lives when family and friends failed to be supportive. The teens‘ relationships with the babies‘ fathers ranged from nonexistent to committed, but these relationships were seldom discussed and were fathers were rarely relied upon to assist in a child rearing capacity or role. About 40% of the teen moms in Shanok‘s study had mild depressive symptoms and were at risk for postpartum depression, but having a strong mother figure in their lives served to protect them against depression. Sometimes, these caring mother figures were provided by a teacher, counselor, or school nurse.

Clear Communication Styles

One study on communication hypothesized that AEP teachers provide a different type and kind of communication that fosters positive relationships with students (Teahan-Zielinski, 2005). The findings confirmed that clear communication skills are necessary on the part of the teacher to develop teacher-to-student relationships and helped to deliver the message to students that teachers care about them and demand that they participate in their own educational process.

Basically, the study confirmed best practices that it is essential for teachers of at-risk students to develop positive classroom relationships where students can perceive their teachers as being both caring and demanding. Teahan-Zielinski found that AEP students who had this perception increased their grade point averages and attendance rates. The study failed to identify any specific register of language used by teachers in the AEP classroom setting as being more or less affective in changing students‘ grade point averages and attendance rates.

Alternative schools have been described by Ellis (2006) as catering to the individual and putting less stress on group culture. Ellis found that in the successful AEP that she researched, rules and traditions were not embedded or imposed and that the success of the individual student was more important than the success of the group. Students did work well together when necessary, but few real friendships existed. She was not able to find evidence of group bonding in her classroom observations. Students verbalized that they had individual learning styles, and what kind of characteristics good teachers had, and even the type of facility that they felt would provide the best learning environment for them. Students also identified barriers such as school size, teacher attitude, and homework as having attributed to their lack of educational success. They described good teachers as those that set high expectations, garnered student trust and respect, individualized the curriculum, and motivated them to do their best in all aspects of life.

Campus Leadership

Walsh-Cairo (2001) studied teacher perceptions of principal effectiveness within fifty-one AEPs in New York, City. Walsh-Cairo used the Audit of Principal Effectiveness by Valentine and Bowman. This survey instrument is very useful in identifying the relationships

between principal skills and other variables within the school setting such as organizational climate, school effectiveness, personnel attitudes and administrative style. The instrument has three domains with the first one being organizational climate which examines three factors: organizational direction, linkage, and procedures. The second domain is organizational environment which examines factors such as teacher and student relations, interactive and affective processes. The third domain examines the educational program which includes the factors of instructional and curriculum improvement. The instrument provides an overall rating of leadership effectiveness. The teachers in the Walsh-Cairo perceived or rated their AEP principals as effective in all domains.

One study on alternative education leadership (Covington, 2003) found that alternative program principals made conscious decisions that allowed issues of human quality, such as commitment to community and an ethos of care to implicate and drive tangible issues of school organization, such as curriculum and scheduling. An interesting finding was that despite this commitment to the success of the students the principals did not see their practice as an exercise in promoting principles of social justice or equity, although they did concede that their traditional counterparts could demonstrate a better sense of care for the students. However, they did not view the implementation of a more caring environment within a regular high school as being one that was practical.

One other study on alternative education leadership (Schuller, 2004) demonstrated that AEP principals utilized the four competencies of transformational leadership to implement changes within their schools. These competencies include vision, communication, trust, and self-development as identified by Bennis and Nanus (1997).

School leadership was explored by Cofield (2005) and she found that not one model of leadership could describe the leadership style of the alternative education program administrators that she studied. Instead, she found that they tended to be eclectic in nature exhibiting parts of the Contingency, Situational, and Visionary models of leadership as well as being grounded in the belief that given the right circumstances, all students can learn.

In 2006, Vickers found that traditional high school principals viewed their roles in increasing Hispanic completion rates as that of being change agents, relationship builders, and promoters of ethic of care through cultural understanding on their campuses. Some of the strategies that these Texas principals used were having an understanding of Ruby Payne training, credit recovery programs, advisory classes, individual student tracking, and social support.

In 2007, Juenemann found that there were five elements that alternative school principals found essential to being effective school leaders: build the capacity of staff, advocate for the school, develop a shared vision and collective responsibility for student success, establish a climate for academic success, and the ability to design relevant programs that connect students to school and the community

Earley (2009) determined that it does not matter if a principal is a traditional or alternative high school principal that basically they agree on the following as being successful strategies for successful schools: curriculum alignment, teaching leadership, professional development, innovation, student-teacher relationships, establishing connections with the parents, instructional leadership, credit recovery, assessment, and implementation of at-risk interventions.

Student Engagement & Motivational Factors

Some of the factors that have been reported to benefit students‘ school and learning engagement in traditional high schools have been teacher characteristics, subject/co-curricular areas, and class size (Fulton, 2007). Fulton‘s finding about traditional high school student engagement differs slightly or has commonalities with the student responses that she found in the alternative education program that she researched. Specifically, AEP students stated that the structure of the day and class, relationship with the teacher, individualized instruction, and small class size engaged them at the alternative program.

Lovett (2009) identified important motivational factors contributing to the academic engagement of at risk students in alternative programs. Lovett found that student self-perceptions of their own competence led to cognitive and positive affective engagement. While, perceptions of relatedness in regard to academic engagement predicted positive affective engagement only, perceptions of own autonomy predicted an overall autonomous regulatory style. Lovett‘s findings indicated that many of the academically at risk students were academically engaged within alternative programs.

Long-Term Lessons

The Oakland Street Academy in California has been around for more than thirty years and Petty (2008) conducted a historical case study to determine what implicit theories of the purposes of education, notions of human potential, and student success the school had to offer. Further, she examined what lessons these theories and the school‘s enduring strengths and challenges held for both the school itself and the field of education. Petty found that the lessons to be learned from the Oakland Street Academy included lessons involving topics on survival

and life as a ―fighter,‖ the meaning of rigor, and planning for the future. Rigor encompasses not only academic rigor, but personalization, caring, and affective development; a deep focus on cultural proficiency; and fostering the development of the students‘ critical, reflective capacity or political consciousness; and the capacity of and impediments to AEPs having a more significant impact on mainstream education; and how districts have a responsibility in adopting an expanded approach to education, and facing complex trade-off for schools.

A ten-year longitudinal study conducted by De La Ossa (2010) found that students could evaluate their high school experiences objectively and these students still held similar evaluations of their AEP experiences as adults that they had had when they were students. Basically, their AEP experiences gave them a sense of success, autonomy, and personal worth. De La Ossa recommended that providing equitable opportunities to pursue graduation was essential to student success later in life and their level of educational satisfaction. De La Ossa‘s study affirmed that alternative education programs were a valid worthwhile choice for students, parents, and other district personnel in charge of making school option decisions for students.

Implications for Research on Alternative Education Programs

Further research on alternative education programs adds to the existing ―scientifically based research‖ that educators draw upon to incorporate in their classrooms. Such research could determine what makes an effective dropout recovery program so that other programs can be designed and implemented according to similar specifications. The research could also help develop a replicable study for conducting and guiding future studies, and provide input for legislators at both the national and state policy-making and funding levels.

The national debate on what is and isn‘t ―research‖ was started in 1994 by two prominent education researchers- Howard Gardner and Elliott W. Eisner. The question posed was: should novels count as doctoral dissertations in education? Such a question has taken on a new urgency as education research and the federal system that feeds it come under the microscope at the national level. A host of interested policy makers, commissions, and advisory groups have sought to spell out what researchers ought to be studying, how they ought to conduct those studies, how the federal government can best support the whole enterprise, and how to ensure that findings get used in real schools and classrooms (Viadero, 1999, June, p.1).

Consequently, questions that have guided researchers in the past were mainly directed at finding those characteristics or qualities of dropouts that make them different from those students who complete high school. Social and personal categories have been scanned to find those that separate the dropout from the stay-in. Dropping out of public schools was construed as a form of social deviance, and an explanation of this deviant action has been sought in the characteristics distinctive to the dropout group (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Subsequently, researchers have needed answers about what and how something can be done to help the group of students who decide to return to school. Montecel wrote that:

> Effective innovations die for the lack of dissemination, diffusion and replication. To have significant effects, a dropout initiative must incorporate provisions for information dissemination and for the networking of persons involved in dropout-related activities. Information diffusion efforts must capitalize on the most effective existing private and public sector networks at local, state, regional, and national levels (Montecel, 1997, p. 5).

At the national level, Montecel's sentiments were echoed by the actions of the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth, and Families which facilitated the passage and adoption of HR 4875, the proposed *Scientifically Based Education Research, Statistics, Evaluation, and Information Act of 2000* by unanimous bipartisan vote. This act would transform how the Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement handled a myriad of woes ranging from shoddy research work on trivial topics, research that was mostly inconclusive, conclusive research that was weakly disseminated and widely ignored, to terminal confusion about where research ends and ―school improvement‖ begins. The bill set criteria for what constitutes sound research and program evaluation and stipulated that only projects satisfying those criteria could be funded. The phrase ―scientifically-based‖ occurred frequently. There was a strong push for bona fide experiments, complete with control groups, which are normal in hard science and biomedical research but staunchly resisted by education researchers enamored of what was termed ―qualitative methods‖ (Finn, 2000, September, pgs. 2-5).

Montecel's outlook on the diffusion of effective practices was also aligned with the latest passage of the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) that urged that research provide practitioners with specific methods and/or strategies that can be readily implemented in the classroom (NCLB, 2002, January). The NCLB was very clear in stating that these activities ―must rely upon strategies that are scientifically based, widely replicable, and sustainable.‖ Such strategies could include the following programs that were deemed to be effective:

- Early intervention programs designed to identify at-risk students;

- Programs serving at-risk students, including racial and ethnic minorities and pregnant and parenting teenagers, designed to prevent these students from dropping out of school;
- Programs to identify youth who have already dropped out of school and encourage them to reenter school and complete their secondary education; and
- Approaches such as breaking larger schools into smaller learning communities and other comprehensive reform approaches, creating alternative school programs, and developing clear linkages from schools to career skills and employment (NCLB, 2002, January).

Finally, the findings of each research project, in accordance with the NCLB law, must seek to provide educators with effective practices of exceptional alternative education programs, ones currently in place and proven to work. Educators can then contextually attempt to replicate these specific practices in similar educational settings serving at-risk students.

Conclusion

Even though the existing literature was replete with descriptive studies of dropouts, there was an urgent need for researchers to migrate into the next phase of dropout prevention or intervention by identifying the characteristics of returning students, the reasons they decide to return to school, and to identify what are the effective characteristics of programs that attract them back to school. The holistic picture has been that there is a dropout problem, but just what was being done within the context of credit recovery programs to attract these young people to return to the classroom to continue and finish their educations has been largely unknown. Why are some of these dropouts deciding to return to alternative education programs and how are they doing academically in this type of educational setting? There has been a need to know what is working (TEA, 2002, Summer). It is apparent that research in the area of alternative education

programs has been especially urgent in light of federal accountability mandates, state compensatory and federal NCLB funding guidelines, and state assessment accountability testing and ratings.

The rest of this dissertation includes Chapter III that addresses the methodology used in addressing the qualitative research questions proposed in this research study. Chapter III is followed by Chapters IV presenting the findings, summary, and conclusions, and finally, Chapter V which includes the discussion and implications.

Chapter III

Methods and Procedures

Introduction

The research for this project was conducted during October 2004. The case study was designed to accomplish several objectives. First, the study sought to create a profile of the characteristics of the students who have returned to school after having dropped out of a public high school setting. Then the study tried to uncover the reasons given by the randomly selected Grade 9-12 students for choosing to reenter into a Texas *Commended* alternative education program for a period of at least 85 days. Finally, the study compared the themes apparent from the student and stakeholder interviews for commonly identified practices that may be attributable to student success in an alternative education setting. In order to accomplish the goals of this study, Chapter III outlines the methodology that was followed during this study so that other practitioners and researchers in the field of education could have access to a blueprint or model to conduct their own studies. This chapter does not include any findings that surfaced as a result of having followed the steps in the methodology, but rather reserves the findings for Chapter IV.

The Research Questions

The study was conducted in the spirit of the No Child Left Behind (P.L 107-110) (NCLB) guidelines that stipulate that ―scientifically based research should involve the application of rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to

education activities and programs‖ (TEA, 2002). To this end, this study asked the following three questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the Grade 9-12 students who have dropped out and later returned to school to complete their studies in a selected alternative education program?
2. What are the reasons that returning students give for making a decision to enroll in a selected alternative education program?
3. What do the students and stakeholders in a selected Texas registered alternative education program perceive as effective practices of the program that encourage students to return and complete their educations?

These three questions were investigated using a qualitative case-study methodology. The sections included in this chapter are: 1) research design; 2) sample site selection procedure; 3) participant stakeholder selection procedures; 4) pilot study and protocol development; 5) instrumentation and data collection procedures and 6) process for analysis of data collected.

The overall approach that was used to conduct this research involved multiple methods that provided a holistic picture of the experience of the people in a contemporary organization and the meaning that these people involved in education made of their experience (Seidman, 1991; Yin 1989). Through this type of data collection, a detailed description of the case emerged, as did an analysis of themes or issues and interpretation or assertions about the case by the researcher (Strake, 1995). This type of analysis was rich in context or setting in which the case presented itself (Merriam, 1988).

Research Design

The study employed qualitative case methodology involving a single site setting or organization with subsettings that included individuals, their respective roles, and small groups (Yin, 1984; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The questions dictated that the research be descriptive, exploratory, and naturalistic in nature. In qualitative studies, questions attempt to understand the *how or what* of a topic in order to initially understand what is going on (Cresswell, 1998). Second, the research was an attempt to *explore* a topic where variables were not easily identified, theories were not available to explain behavior of participants or their population of study, and where theories needed to be developed (Cresswell, 1998). Third, these qualitative research questions were utilized to present a *detailed view* and close-up view of the topic (Cresswell, 1998) because one did not exist. Fourth, a qualitative design was used to study individuals in their *natural setting* (Cresswell, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This design involved going out to the setting or field of study, gaining access, and gathering material. These actions minimized contrived findings that could have resulted when participants are removed from their setting. Fifth, a qualitative approach was used because as the principal researcher, there was an interest in *writing* in a literary style and bringing myself into the study. The study employed the occasional use of the pronoun "I" and at times engaged in a storytelling form of narration (Cresswell, 1998). There was use of expressive language and persuasion by reason (Eisner, 1991). The key instrument of data collection was the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen; 1992; Eisner, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985); the data was collected as words or pictures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), and the outcome was a result of the process rather than a product (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988). Sixth, an

allocation of *sufficient time and resources* was used in order to spend adequate time in the collection of data in the field and for the detailed data analysis of "text" information (Cresswell, 1998). Seventh, there is an assumption that the prevailing and interested *audiences can be expected to be receptive* to the qualitative aspect of the topic being researched as it will most certainly be considered relevant, not only at the time the research was conducted, but at later times due to the urgency to find a solution to the problem of drop-out recovery (Cresswell, 1998). Finally, the qualitative approach was utilized to emphasize my role as the researcher to be that of an *active learner* who can tell the story from the participants' point of view rather than as an "expert" who passes judgment on participants (Cresswell, 1998). The focus was on the participants' perspectives and their meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988).

Site Selection

Using the *collective case approach* (Strake, 1988), purposeful sampling was employed as the method for site selection using specific criteria for selecting a case for the study. The initial field sites were selected based on the initial criterion that the AEP was rated *Commended* during the 2001-2002 school-years by the Agency's Registered Alternative Education Program Division. Consequently, seven alternative education campuses across the state of Texas qualified under this AEIS designation. The researcher then narrowed the number of these initially identified field sites to ensure selection of the best possible and representative field site by using the following specific criteria:

At the State-wide level: The *Commended* registered alternative education program,

inclusive of both the district and region it was located in, had to meet the criteria for economically disadvantaged representation that meets the state's average of at least 50.5% for the 2001-02 school-year (TEA, 2001). This process ensured that the study dealt with a population of students designated as being from a low socio-economic background to further tighten the representative nature of the study group to other cohorts of similar students. In addition, the criterion of being economically disadvantaged ensured that the most at-risk population of students, those tending to drop out in greater numbers (TEA, 2002) and generally most in need of intervention strategies would be addressed in this study. This aspect was crucial with respect to issues of *transferability,* or the ability to apply the conclusions of a study to other situations, and also with respect to issues of *generalizability* where the reading audience could, in turn, explore, inspect, relate, or link the patterns and experiences that were to be evoked from the interviewees' experiences. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The list of the selected *Commended* alternative education programs at the state-wide level was then reduced to include only those campuses with enrollment in Grades 9-12. This criterion was essential to ensure that a representative collection or array of students associated with high drop-out rates was available for study (TEA, 2002).

At the District-wide level: The remaining list of potential study sites was narrowed even further to include only AEP campuses located within school districts where the program had a better chance of including a full array of student representation from the four major ethnic student populations in Texas public schools. This narrowing of sites was an important aspect for site-selection as the research project called for representative input from the different ethnic groups attending one of these alternative education programs. The reasoning behind this

criterion was that, if the district population included a healthy representation from the four major ethnic groups, then the chances increased that the alternative education program also had the same opportunity for representative samples of these students. This situation may not always be the case in reality, but what mattered was that the selected site had the opportunity to reflect proportional representation of the four ethnic groups: Hispanic, White, African-American, and Other.

At the Campus wide level: The *Commended* alternative education campus also had to be the exclusive recipient of the dropouts or enrollees who had previously attended the district's local high school or high schools. This selection criterion was necessary to further reduce the intervention of outside variables or students who did not have the perspective of having previously attended the local feeder high school or district. Therefore, it was prudent that the site not have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with other nearby districts to receive their dropouts or students wishing to enroll in the alternative education program. This final criterion made it possible to tighten the study by comparing the randomly selected students' responses to the combined administrator and teacher perspectives. This final criterion ensured that perspectives shared during the interviews were contextually consistent to the study site. As a result of following this specific site selection methodology the following district and campus profiles were found at the study site.

The District Profile

The district within which the study site was located in deep South Texas within a Regional Service Center where approximately 58% of the students were designated as being economically

disadvantaged, about 67% were Hispanic, 28% were White, 4% were African-American, and 1% was designated as Other. The annual dropout rate within the regional service center was about 0.9% and the four-year dropout rate at the time, was tabulated at about 6.1% (TEA, 2002). The district itself had about 4,500 students with 66% being labeled as economically disadvantaged. Approximately 80% of the students within the district were Hispanic, 15% were White, and 4.0% were African-American with another 1% being in the ―Other‖ category meaning they were either Native American or Asian/Pacific Islander. The district exhibited a high retention rate in Grades 7 and Grade 8; specifically, 5.0% in each of these years as compared to the corresponding state retention rates of 2.3% and 1.7%, respectively.

About, 70% of the teachers in the district were Hispanic, 30% were White, with 2% being African-American. About 80% of these teachers were female and 20% were male. In addition, about 30% of the teachers had between 11-20 years of experience, with the average years of experience being 14.0 years. The average years of experience the teachers had working within the district was about 10.0 years with a 16% turnover rate. The district had most recently been rated Academically Acceptable with Gold Performance Acknowledgements for its Recommended High School Program Class of 2003 (TEA, 2003-04 District Profile).

The district is located within a city that is known for agriculture, oil, and banking. The city has a fine historic district filled with antique shops and businesses that regale its bygone days in ranching as a prosperous hub for merchants to buy, sell, and transport their wares to the big cities via the railways. A generous pioneering benefactress donated money for the first high school and later donated the land for a local community college with a specific purpose in mind- that the

college train much needed teachers

Campus Profile

The alternative education campus selected for this study was located on a farm-to-market road on the outskirts of the town. The campus was actually an old elementary school that was closed due to declining enrollments and funding. The alternative education program had been previously located at another site, but once the elementary school was vacated, the school district decided to place both the disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) and the alternative education program (AEP) on the same campus to benefit from a shared cafeteria, a principal, a counselor, a PEIMS clerk, and most recently, an assistant principal. The campus was also utilized for summer school and for night school or tutorial classes. The campus also had the added advantage of being able to house a day care center for the children of the students attending the alternative education program during the day while they studied or worked. The day care center provided van transportation to and from the school for both the parents and their children. The only special program that the campus had was the daycare center which provides child care to the parenting students of both the traditional high school and the alternative education program students. The AEP did not provide any special areas programs such as art, music, or physical education, nor did it provide any state or federally funded programs for the students.

At the time of the study, none of the Grade 9 or Grade 10 students at the campus had taken the TAKS exit level tests. These exit level tests are available in the areas of English Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science, and Writing. All of these subjects had been tested

during the October 2004 fall administration and many of the students in Grades 11 and Grade 12 had taken the tests. A few of these students had already passed some of these tests during previous administrations. Some students took as few as one exit level test, while others took as many as five during the fall administration. Basically, students took the examinations in the subject areas that they still needed to pass or that they lacked in order to fulfill some of their graduation requirements.

Students in Grade 9 by Sex, Grade, Special Programs, Age & TAKS Results																
St	Sx	Gr	T1	SE	BL	ESL	At-R	GT	CT	DOB	Age on 11/29/2004	EngLA	Math	SS	Sci	W
1	M	9					1		0	8/10/1989	15.4	*	*	*	*	*
2	F	9					1		2	10/16/1987	17.1	*	*	*	*	*
3	M	9					1		0	11/13/1987	17	*	*	*	*	*
4	F	9					1		2	10/31/1986	18.1	*	*	*	*	*
5	F	9					1		0	11/29/1987	17	*	*	*	*	*
6	M	9					1		1	10/24/1987	17.1	*	*	*	*	*
7	F	9					1		0	11/29/1987	17	*	*	*	*	*
8	F	9					1		3	1/7/1988	16.11	*	*	*	*	*
9	F	9					1		1	8/17/1989	15.4	*	*	*	*	*
											149.22= 16 yrs. 8 months					
											6 Females 3 Males					

Students in Grade 10 by Sex, Grade, Special Programs, Age & TAKS Results																
St	Sx	Gr	T1	SE	BL	ESL	At-R	GT	CT	DOB	Age on 11/29/2004	EngLA	Math	SS	Sci	W
1	F	10		1			1		1	7/19/1987	17.5	*	*	*	*	*
2	M	10					1		0	12/15/1987	16.11	*	*	*	*	*
3	F	10					1		2	4/5/1988	16.8	*	*	*	*	*
4	F	10					1		0	10/5/1987	17.1	*	*	*	*	*
5	M	10					1		0	8/26/1986	18.3	*	*	*	*	*
6	M	10					1		0	3/15/1988	16.9	*	*	*	*	*
7	F	10					1		0	10/22/1987	17.1	*	*	*	*	*
8	M	10					1		0	5/31/1988	16.6	*	*	*	*	*
9	M	10					1		0	12/21/1986	17.11	*	*	*	*	*
10	F	10					1		3	5/31/1988	16.6	*	*	*	*	*
											166.61= 17 yrs. 0 months					
											5 Females 5 Males					

In Grade 11, English Language Arts exit level, a total of 13 students took the October TAKS administration with 4 students failing, 6 others passing, 2 students were absent, and 1 student was Not Scored, and 4 others had already passed it during the April 2004 Spring Administration. Within this same cohort, 17 other students attempted to pass the Math exit-level and 15 students failed, 1 was absent, 1 passed, and 1 had already passed it during the April 2004 exam. Then in the area of Social Studies, 12 students participated in the test with 6 passing, 3 failing, 2 were absent, 1 was Not Scored, with 6 students having passed this content area during the Spring 2004 examinations. Science had 15 students sitting for the test with 12 failing, 1 absent 1 passing, 1 being Not Scored, and 3 others had already passed during the spring examinations. In the area of Writing, 12 students sat for the exam with 9 passing, 2 failing with a holistic score of a zero or a one, 1 student was absent and 6 others had already passed this subject exam in Spring 2004.

Students in Grade 11 by Sex, Grade, Special Programs, Age & TAKS Results																
St	Sx	Gr	T1	SE	BL	ESL	At-R	GT	CT	DOB	Age on 11/29/2004	EngLA	Math	SS	Sci	W
1	M	11					1		0	3/24/1986	18.8					
2	M	11					1		0	5/17/1986	18.7					
3	F	11					1		1	2/26/1988	16.9					
4	M	11					1		0	11/16/1986	18	N	N	P	N	2
5	F	11					1		0	5/12/1987	17.7					
6	F	11					1		0	10/12/1987	17.1					
7	F	11					1		1	8/4/1984	20.4					
8	M	11					1		0	8/3/1985	19.4					
9	F	11					1		0	2/10/1988	16.9					
10	M	11					1		3	12/22/1986	17.11	N	N	Y	N	0
11	F	11					1		3	9/25/1985	19.2	N	N	A	N	1
12	F	11					1		0	3/6/1986	18.9	Y	N	P	P	3
13	M	11					1		0	3/18/1986	18.8	Y	N	P	P	P
14	F	11					1		0	12/17/1986	17.11	N	N	N	N	2
15	F	11					1		0	3/25/1988	16.8					
16	M	11					1		0	1/12/1987	17.11	Y	N	P	P	4
17	F	11					1		2	9/8/1984	20.3					
18	F	11					1		0	3/25/1986	18.8					
19	M	11					1		3	1/18/1986	18.11	P	P	P	N	P
20	M	11		1			1		2	2/28/1985	19.9					
21	F	11					1		3	4/29/1987	17.7	0	N	0	NS	P
22	F	11					1		0	8/27/1987	17.3	P	N	Y	N	P
23	F	11					1		3	7/25/1986	18.4	Y	N	N	N	3
24	F	11					1		0	7/6/1987	17.5	P	N	P	N	P
25	M	11					1		0	7/7/1987	17.5	Y	N	Y	N	P
26	F	11					1		1	5/5/1988	16.7	Y	N	Y	N	3
27	F	11					1		1	11/19/1987	17					
28	F	11					1		1	4/21/1986	18.8	Y	N	Y	N	2
29	F	11					1		3	2/25/1987	17.9	A	A	A	A	A
30	F	11					1		0	4/21/1987	17.7	P	N	P	P	P
31	M	11					1		0	5/15/1988	16.7					
32	F	11					1		2	9/10/1985	19.3	A	N	N	N	P
33	M	11					1		3	2/2/1987	17.1	Y	Y	Y	Y	3
											579.215= 18 yrs. 0 months					
											21 Females 12 Males					

In Grade 12, English Language Arts, 3 students took the exit level exam and 3 passed, while 5 other students had already passed during the Spring of 2004. In the area of Math, 8 students took the exam and 7 students passed and 1 student failed. In Social Studies, 1 student took the exam and they also passed, while 7 others had already passed in the Spring. In Science, 5 students took the exam and 4 passed, 1 failed, and 3 others had previously passed during the Spring testing session. Finally, in the area of Writing, 3 students took and passed this subject with 5 other students having mastered this area in the Spring of 2004.

Students in Grade 12 by Sex, Grade, Special Programs, Age & TAKS Results																	
St	Sx	Gr	T1	SE	BL	ESL	At-R	GT	CT	DOB	Age on 11/29/2004	Eng LA	Math	SS	Sci	W
1	F	12					1		2	4/23/1987	17.7	P	Y	P	P	P
2	F	12					1		1	10/18/1985	19.2					
3	M	12					1		0	10/20/1986	18.2					
4	M	12					1		2	2/26/1987	17.9					
5	F	12					1		0	5/16/1986	18.7	Y	Y	P	Y	3
6	F	12					1		0	4/12/1987	17.8	P	Y	P	Y	P
7	M	12					1		3	9/6/1985	19.3					
8	F	12					1		0	1/13/1987	17.1	Y	Y	Y	Y	3
9	M	12					1		0	12/19/1986	17.11	Y	Y	P	Y	2
10	M	12					1		0	7/22/1986	18.5					
11	F	12					1		0	12/6/1985	19					
12	F	12					1		0	5/7/1987	17.7	P	N	P	P	P
13	F	12					1		2	12/12/1986	17.11	P	Y	P	P	P
14	M	12					1		0	3/26/1986	18					
15	F	12					1		3	8/20/1984	20.3					
16	M	12					1		0	4/16/1986	18.7	P	Y	P	N	P
17	M	12					1		0	12/2/1985	19					
											305.92= 18 yrs. 4 months					
											9 Females 8 Males					

Campus Participant Selection

Much care was taken in selecting the campus participants- the AEP administrators, teachers, and office personnel. Before these campus personnel were allowed to participate in the study, they had to meet the criterion of having been at the selected site of study during the 2001-02 school-years, or the last year for which the campus had received a *Commended* rating. These participants were then asked to complete an initial questionnaire that laid the groundwork for introduction to the research project prior to initial contact with the researcher. If the AEP stakeholders numbered fewer than ten, then comprehensive sampling (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) was to be utilized where all campus personnel were to be interviewed regardless of their presence on the campus during the 2001-02 school-years. The assumption here was that the program practices in place in during the prior year, would more than likely still be the prevailing practices to be found at the study site a year later.

Participant Profile

The participants in the study site consisted of the current principal, the ex-principal, a secretary, and seven teachers. There was also a counselor, a PEIMS clerk, and an assistant principal who declined their inclusion in the study due to their very brief time on the campus. Of the 10 participants, 7 had been on the site during the 2001-2002 school-years when the school was awarded the *Exemplary* rating. These individuals consisted of 7 females and 3 males and they averaged 16 years 6 months of educational experience with an average of 12 years of working within the district. The number of years that these faculty and staff members averaged

working within the alternative education campus was 8 years and 4 months with 2 out of the 10 adults having retired. Of these, one returned on the re-tire, re-hire program for teachers that desire to keep teaching after they have officially taken full retirement through the state. This one particular teacher had already been on the campus a total of 11 years prior to the study. He had been instrumental in prior and subsequent years from the year the *Exemplary* rating was achieved in helping to maintain the same quality instruction and dedication to the students. One of the teacher participants was fully retired at the time the on-site interviews were conducted and was on a re-tire/re-hire status. The roles that these individuals had held during their years of working within the educational system ranged from those of being a teacher, an assistant principal, a counselor, a director, a volunteer, a professor, a principal, a teaching assistant, a PEIMS clerk, or a child care director.

Administrative, Teacher & Staff Profile							
Coded Individual	**Gender Of the Individual**	**Contributed to the Exemplary Rating in 2001-2002?**	**Years in Ed.?**	**Roles Held In Ed.?**	**Years In District?**	**Years In AEP?**	**Retired Yet?**
Current Principal	Male	No	15	Teacher, Asst. Principal, Principal	12	2	No
Ex-Principal	Female	Yes	30	Teacher Sp. Progs. Director Principal	30	14	Yes
Teacher 1	Female	Yes	15	Counselor, Teacher	5	5	No
Teacher 2	Female	No	11	Teacher	10	2	No
Teacher 3	Male	No	12	Teacher	11	11	Yes, Retired/ Rehired
Teacher 4	Female	Yes	16	Counselor, Teacher, Professor	7	7	No
Teacher 5	Male	Yes	14	Teacher	10	10	No
Teacher 6	Female	Yes	26	Teacher, Childcare Director	14	14	No
Teacher 7	Female	Yes	5	Volunteer,Teacher	5	5	No
Secretary	Female	Yes	22	Teaching Asst., PEIMS Clerk, Volunteer, Secretary	16	14	No
Average Totals	7 Females 3 Males 10 Total	3 No 7 Yes	16.6 years Ave. in Ed.	Individuals held Various roles	12 years Ave. in District	8.4 years Ave. in AEP	2 Retired/ Rehired 8 Not Retired

Student Selection

The second part of the initial questionnaire established a framework of initial reference for conducting student interviews. The students selected for the study were randomly selected from the current campus alpha list. Once the student had been selected to participate, the students' parent or parents automatically qualified to be study participants and received an invitation to participate in individual on-site interviews. Parents indicating a willingness to participate, but who might be unable to travel to the study site were to be interviewed by phone as necessary. No more than 10 randomly selected students were to be selected at the site. The rationale behind this type of selection was an attempt to manage a high quality process that included no more than 20 to 25 participants from the selected site for in-depth interviews.

The campus consisted of a total of 9 Grade 9 students, 10 Grade 10 students, 33 Grade 11 students, and 17 Grade 12 students. The campus enrollment indicated a total of 76 students, but 6 students had already graduated and one additional student was dropped from the roster as they were no longer enrolled at the campus. This left 69 viable students to select from for the student interviews. Of these, only 43 students had or would have 80 days of enrollment by the end of the fall semester of 2004. From this list, every eighth student was selected to be interviewed and this process produced a sample size of 10 students. Of this sample size, only 5 students were able to be interviewed as the other five were unable to obtain parental or guardian permission granting them access to an interview. All parents, of the students that were granted permission to

interview, were invited to meet for an interview, but only one was able to do so. In all, 10 faculty and staff members, 5 students, and 1 parent participated in the study.

Student Profile

There were 9 students enrolled in Grade 9. Of these, 6 were female and 3 were male. The average age for these Grade 9 students was 16 years and 8 months. There were 10 students enrolled in Grade 10. There were 5 females and 5 male students with an average age of 17 years and 0 months. There were 33 students in Grade 11. There were 20 females and 13 males and their average age was 18 years and 0 months. There were 17 students in Grade 12. There were 9 female and 8 male students with an average age of 18 years 4 months. In all, there were a total of 40 females and 29 males enrolled during the week that the study was conducted. Altogether there were 69 enrolled students at the study site with two students being classified as being in Special Education. At the same time, 100 % of the students were coded as being At-Risk due to their drop out status from the high school. Of the 69 enrolled students, 15 were classified as being White and 54 were coded as being Hispanic. A total of 29 students were also taking Career and Technology courses while at the alternative education center.

Data Collection Procedures

Employment of the comparative case study method within the selected study site was utilized to enhance broader investigation of attitudes, opinions, and observations (Denzin, 1989). Theoretically, findings and conclusions in a case study tend to be more convincing and accurate if they are based on several different *corroboratory* sources (Yin, 1990) or on multiple sources of information rich in context (Cresswell, 1998). This relied on the collection of three basic types

of information: interviews, document research, and observations (Cresswell, 1998). Interviews consisted of the use of initial questionnaires, focus group discussions, and individualized interviews. This doctoral study was conducted by doing a prior assessment of my full range of experiences and skills that might be useful in conducting this case study.

Preparation for Data Collection

Prior to the research being conducted, the researcher worked for the Texas Education Agency in the Division of Quality, Compliance, Accountability, and Reviews (QCAR) and held the position of Program Specialist V for three years. As a result, there was a direct involvement in conducting cyclical program reviews during District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) and Bilingual/English as a second language (BE/ESL) visits. These duties also involved planning and coordination of accreditation visits to low-performing districts and campuses, including charter schools and alternative education programs. Consequently, this contact allowed the researcher to become adept in dealing with or communicating with school superintendents of the sites to be visited and in gaining the trust and confidence of school officials. The disclosure of my background thus establishes my *positionality* or stance as the principal researcher with regard to conducting this study (Lincoln, 1995). The researcher was the chief instrument used for the in-depth interviewing in this doctoral study.

An important aspect of conducting this on-site study was gaining the cooperation and trust of the individuals or research respondents who participated in the completion of the research project. According to Wax (1971), it is important to build *reciprocal* relationships prior to and during entry to a field site. The establishment of *reciprocity* means that an intense

sharing, trust, and mutuality exist between the researcher and those being researched (Lincoln, 1995). This was an important standard in establishing a quality piece of research.

Pre-Entry

The principal, teachers, and office staff member received a structured questionnaire to complete prior to the visit. Later, on-site interviews followed both a structured and unstructured format to allow these stakeholders to share their perceptions of what they considered to be effective practices of the alternative program and how they had an impact on those practices they deemed to be successful.

This pre-entry process allowed documentation and tracking of just how these stakeholders' perceptions either converged thematically or diverged as to what they perceived to be effective practices that led to student success and achievement within the registered alternative education program. Most importantly, this process allowed for insight into how these individual stakeholders' specific behaviors or roles impacted the success of the AEP program. This careful selection of an array of stakeholders for the study provided alternative or multiple *voices* that further contributed to the interpretative quality of the text and the findings (Lincoln, 1995).

Document Research

Review of documents consisted of TAAS and TAKS student testing results, district PEIMS data, and district data reviews such as attendance records, systemic processes that were in place, and teacher developed documents used for management of student information such as lesson plans, classroom schedules, phone logs, agendas and minutes of parent-teacher conferences, and other campus meetings pertinent to the implementation and development of specific effective

practices within the alternative education program. In addition, district and campus improvement plans were reviewed for documentation of monetary support, strategic planning by objectives, timelines, formative and summative evaluations, and specific intervention strategies aimed as special populations of students not only within the district, but within the alternative education program.

Specifically, document data for this study was derived from the campus staff roundtable discussion, classroom observations, administrative, teacher, parent, and student interviews. The study site also provided documents such as TEA's on-line AEIS state, district, and campus TAAS and TAKS scores results, the campus improvement plan (CIP), the original copies of the October 2004 TAKS scores for both Grade 11 and Grade 12 exiting students, and copies of teacher made contracts or lessons for the individual disciplines. Campus newsletters and student monitoring forms were also reviewed. Taped interviews were transcribed into hard paper copies and analyzed, coded, member-checked, and triangulated to determine participant perceptions of what constituted effective program practices. The information gathered from the analysis of these interviews and the data gleaned from documents review as well as observational notes were used to corroborate the effective practices that were in place to ensure student success within the selected alternative education program.

Initial Questionnaires

First, prior to the actual on-site interviews a *Letter to the Superintendent* (Appendix D) was generated and sent to obtain consent to conduct the study. Subsequently, an appropriate *Consent to Participate* (Appendices E, F, and G), along with a carefully worded questionnaire was sent to

the selected students and stakeholders to establish an initial focus for further discussion during the actual on-site interviews. This questionnaire was referred to as the *Prior On-Site Questionnaire: Participant's Background in Education* (Appendix H). The criterion for selecting the stakeholders depended on whether they had been on the alternative education campus during the 2001-02 school-years. This ensured that the respondents represented individuals who were directly responsible for helping students succeed to the level at which the campus achieved the rating of *Commended* in 2001-02. The use of criterion sampling ensures quality assurance when all cases meet some standard (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). Basically, the questionnaires included standardized open-ended questions (Patton, 1990) and focused on establishing the individual's background with respect to ―how‖ they came to be involved in the alternative education program. This type of questionnaire was essential to help reduce the bias that could result from having different interview questions posed to different respondents (Patton, 1990). In addition, the questionnaires provided the researcher with initial historical and background information about the participants and helped to establish rapport and facilitate further interaction during the study.

Focus Group Interviews

Another method used in this study included the use of focus group discussions or panel interviews to establish the criterion of ―fairness‖ or a balance of stakeholder views by providing a forum for the exchange of shared knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The moderated focus group sessions were of one-hour in duration and were scheduled at the end of the school day. The campus focus group included the campus principal, assistant principal, and selected

teachers. The focus group discussions allowed for additional information that could corroborate information already obtained. The focus group discussions or interviews allowed for synergistic exchanges between the participants and the interviewer. Participants shared their unique experiences and provided the opportunity to reflect on the commonalities and differences of these experiences and to interpret the findings continuously. This activity further allowed the clarification of information and to modify and simultaneously develop and ask appropriate questions as the discussion unfolded. The *constant comparative method* was used to establish the significance of what was being observed and verified (Patton, 1990). The relevant perceptions obtained from the campus roundtable that were deemed to contribute to the effective program characteristics were documented, compared, and analyzed, immediately and continuously.

Interviewing Techniques

Adherence to interviewing techniques such as listening more and talking less were utilized in order to be able to concentrate on what the interviewees were saying. This technique allowed the opportunity to internalize the details for a complete and thorough understanding of interviewees' oral contributions. Active listening to the interviewees' ―*inner voice*‖ versus their ―*outer voice*‖ was used to fully appreciate the meaning of their experiences. Occasionally, *role-playing* questions (Patton, 1989; Spradley, 1979) were used to put the interviewees at ease and help shift the interviewees' frame of reference enough to speak as if they were someone else in an assumed, but familiar role. Focusing on the substance of the interview while remaining conscious of the time, the participant's level of energy, and other non-verbal cues, while continuously assessing how to move the interview forward proved to be useful during the

interviews (Cresswell, 1991). Notes of interviews and interviewees were taken and transcribed with followed-up to seek clarification, concrete details, and stories that might shed light on effective practices within the alternative education program. Questions were made for purposes of clarity, chronology, and establishment of significant links between the interviews in a cumulative interview structure to gain a full understanding of the context of the interviewees' experience. The questions *explored* (Seidman, 1991) or *probed* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) beyond the generalities and asked about details that hinted at hidden, but important stories. Stories told could constitute a beginning, middle, and an end to illuminate an experience, draw characters, present conflict, and demonstrate how the respondent dealt with it (Mishler, 1986). The use of leading questions was avoided (Patton, 1989; Richardson et al., 1965) while open-ended ―*grand tour*‖ and ―*mini-tour*‖ questions were used as relevant and appropriate to sustain in-depth interviewing (Spradley, (1979). Interruption of participants was avoided by jotting down key words in their narrative and returning to them at a later point in the interview for further discussion in what is known as the ―*echo*‖ approach (Richardson, et al., 1965). The focus of the interviews was on the subject with emphasis on concrete details. Sensitivity was employed and understood when a participant pulled back after having shared too much. Patience and understanding were utilized fully recognizing that participants eventually would find a comfort zone for sharing. At times, sharing of personal experiences was used to encourage participants to connect to and continue reconstructing their own experiences using their own inner voices. This technique aids in overcoming *impediments to memory* (Tagg, 1985) as the participant uses recall to reconstruct (Thelen, 1989). Reinforcement of participants' responses as being either

negative or positive was avoided by not using affirmative listening responses such as ―uh huh,‖ ―OK,‖ or ―yes‖ to statements being contributed. Sensitivity was utilized in exploring laughter and the real meaning behind it by following hunches; while, the cautious use of an interview guide was used in order not to impose or divert the respondent‘s concentration away from what they were saying. Finally, interviewer silence was used after posing questions so that the interviewees had ample time to think, reflect, and compose a quality responses that might otherwise not have been forthcoming had questions or a series of prompting questions had been immediately asked after the first question. An exhibit of genuine interest in other people‘s stories along with the temperance and foundation necessary for using the recommended techniques and skills for quality interviewing were judiciously employed (Seidman, 1991). The topic of how to recoup drop-outs is one of genuine interest to me. Gathering data that could contribute to the lessening of the number of dropouts across Texas and the nation is a contribution that this case study hoped to make by adhering to quality research techniques and skills.

The Individualized Three-Interview Method

Besides the focus group interviews, individualized interviews were also conducted in the form of a unique method involving three interviews of the same individual. This unique in-depth phenomenological three-interview method was developed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982). As mentioned before, people‘s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. This context allows for the possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience (Patton, 1989).

First Interview: Focused Life History

The first interview (Appendix I), the *Focused Life History*, established the context of the participants‘ experience by asking them to tell as much as possible about themselves in the light of the topic being studied. Asking the participants to put their experiences in the alternative education program within the context of their life histories prevented the asking of direct questions such as ―Why did you become a teacher (a principal, a student, etc.) in the alternative education program? Instead, interviewees were asked how they came to be participants in the program by prefacing the questions with the word, ―How?‖ so that they could reconstruct a range of events in their past experiences. This first interview was used to corroborate the initial pre-visit information provided on the initial questionnaire and also to expand on the past history and experience of the participants.

Second Interview: Details of the Experience

The first interview session of this study continued with a second interview, known as the *Details of the Experience* (Appendix J) that established the experiential background of the participants within the context or setting of the case, their daily experiences within the environment that is the alternative education program. This second interview was important because it revealed how people spent their time at work, doing those things required of them or important to them that could be having a direct impact on student performance. The *Details of the Experience* provided much needed insight into the practices that participants followed within the scope of their responsibilities that could be seen as being effective teaching or management practices that facilitated student achievement.

The Third Interview: Reflection on the Meaning

The second interview session continued with the third component of the three-interview method, the *Reflection on the Meaning* (Appendix K). This interview session addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life. Participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience. This second interview session involved putting the experience into language in a *meaning-making process* (Vygotsky, 1987). Participants selected or recalled events from their past, in this case from the groundwork established in the first two interviews, that imparted meaning to them. It was this meaning-making that become the center of attention (Cresswell, 1998). This same three-interview format was used to interview the selected student participants. The interview questions were appropriately reworded for these student participants as needed (Appendix L). The ultimate interest was in gaining an understanding of participants' experiences and in the *"subjective understanding"* or what meaning they made of their experiences within the context of the alternative education program setting (Schultz, 1967).

Observations

Observations consisting of front office, classroom, and campus visits were conducted in order to gather field notes of processes that could contribute to effective practices. The technique of *persistent observation* was employed to achieve salience and add depth to the study by focusing on the details or elements in situations that were most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An *observational log* identifying the characteristics of the people being observed, problem, time, place, and reason for using the elements or techniques employed to address the situation was kept.

After the initial faculty and staff roundtable concluded, appointments were made with the teachers to set a best time to conduct a walk through in their classroom for the purposes of conducting a twenty to twenty-five minute observation in their classrooms. All faculty members gladly obliged and were happy to have an observer coming in to their classrooms. They were looking forward to showing how their rooms were set up and how they ran their classrooms. As mentioned before, the life skills teacher was also part of the faculty and staff roundtable, but she was not part of the alternative education program. She and her students were being housed on the campus to take advantage of the vocational education program that was being provided on the campus. At her urging and that of the other faculty at the campus, a decision was made to oblige and drop in to see the wonderful job that she was doing with her students, too. However, notes were not taken during the visit to her classroom.

Classroom observations in the other AEP classrooms revealed that the teachers used computers with the A-Plus software and other supplementary computer programs to address student needs. Teachers also used textbooks and various manipulative materials or equipment in Math and Science. It was evident that the teachers were very organized with many areas set purposely aside so that students felt that they had space to move around in or to as needed. There were round and rectangular tables that were utilized for small group instruction and teachers would either work with students that were on the same materials at these sites or work with a student individually as needed.

Many students worked at their own pace with teacher assistance as needed if they were ahead or lagged behind their other classmates. The students knew what to do when they arrived in the

classrooms. They had working notebooks, journals, or folders conveniently located in bins. Teachers had already pre-loaded these folders with materials or instructions as to what the students needed to do for that particular class session. The class sizes were small with class sizes averaging about 10 to 12 students. The atmosphere or climate within each of the classrooms was relaxed, yet focused. The students and teachers knew that their primary mission was to cover the material, take end of chapter or course tests, and to eventually pass the TAKS exit tests in order to receive their high school diplomas.

Protocols

Protocols, or predetermined sheets, were used to log information learned during the observations and interviews. These protocols enabled note-taking during interviews and facilitated the organization of thoughts on items such as headings, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending the interview, and thanking the respondents (Cresswell, 1991). One protocol sheet was employed for each of the three individualized interviews: the focus group interviews, interviews of the AEP administrators and teaching personnel, and students.

Organization of Materials

Materials were carefully assembled for use in data collection and to effectively manage the time allotted to the different activities (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Audio tapes of at least 90 minutes capacity were used to conduct each of the three individualized interviews, focus group interviews, and to record daily auto notes (Cresswell, 1991). In addition, an unobtrusive tape recorder with a built-in directional voice-activated microphone was used (Seidman, 1991).

Color coded binders with write-on tab dividers were used to store the transcribed data and protocol notes (Patton, 1990). Microsoft Word for Windows Excel program was used to analyze and winnow auditable categories and themes from the transcripts through use of coding and memos.

Methods for Data Analysis

Interview transcripts, observational notes, and other documents (Dey, 1993; Smith, 1979; Tesch, 1990, p. 90) were read in order to analyze them; along, with reflective notes and memos while reading the data to develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships. Analytic options such as memos (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 72-75; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 197-223), categorizing of strategies, and *contextualizing strategies* (Maxwell & Miller, 1996) were combined to facilitate thinking, stimulate insight, and develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships. The main categorizing strategies used were coding and thematic analysis. Coding was used to ―fracture‖ (Strauss, 1987, p. 29) the data and rearrange it into categories to facilitate comparison of data within and between categories to aid in the development of theoretical concepts. Coding was grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and was developed in interaction with, and tailored to the understanding of, the particular data being analyzed. This process helped to winnow the data into broader themes and issues. The data was further reduced and presented in matrices or tables in order to be visually understood as a whole (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, memos and codes were linked by cross-referencing to the data that gave rise to them, in order not to lose the original context from which they developed. Moreover, in order to achieve a balanced or well-rounded account (Maxwell &

Miller, 1996), care was taken to understand the individuals or situations in the case study by looking for relationships that connected statements and events within a context into a coherent whole. This *linking of data* (Dey 1993) was achieved through use of the following contextualizing strategies: narrative analysis (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990), individual case studies (Patton, 1990), and reading for ―voice‖ (Brown, 1988).

Maxwell (1996) asserted that a research question that ―asks about the way events in a specific context are connected cannot be answered by an exclusively categorizing analytic strategy.‖ Conversely, he also states that ―a question about similarities and differences across settings or individuals cannot be answered by an exclusively contextualizing strategy (Maxwell 1996, p. 80). *Composite sequence analysis* (Huberman, 1989/1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 204-206) was used in order to integrate the categorizing and contextualizing analysis of the qualitative data. The primary goal of the data analysis was to inductively develop or build a theory of what exactly was going on in a *Commended* public alternative education program that might constitute specific effective practices for student achievement.

For the purposes of this study, the interview transcripts were read numerous times to glean emergent information that was then coded into emergent themes by the researcher. Member checking was used to corroborate that these themes were in fact correctly coded. The coded themes were then counted into a matrix illustrating all of the identified themes. A final tally count was obtained for each of these themes within the matrix. Eventually, the themes were grouped into five holistic themes.

Trustworthiness

In order to increase the trustworthiness of this case study, four *field journals* were kept. The first included the *day-to-day log of activities*, much like a calendar of appointments that include the date and time of day. The second field journal was a *personal log or reflexive journal* to note introspections about what was happening in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba, 1981). This second journal provided introspective notations about the expectations, frustrations and anxieties being experienced in dealing with personal biases as constructions and hypotheses, as new questions developed (Reinharz, 1979; Spradley, 1979; Wax, 1979). A *methodological log* was also kept to record decisions made in accordance with the emergent design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Lincoln, 1981). As previously mentioned, an *observational log* was also utilized. Finally, all of these logs were kept in a black, tabbed binder for easy reference throughout the process of collecting data at the field site.

While conducting the research, the following precautions were taken to increase the probability that trustworthiness was achieved. The criterion of credibility was established by following the practice of *prolonged engagement* and close monitoring of responses to help minimize respondent reactivity and distortions (Guba 1978). To ensure this safeguard, one whole week was spent at the study site to ensure that the *developmental process of building trust* (Johnson, 1975) was in place. Active diligence was kept in trying to be cognizant and sensitive to the fact that biases could be introduced by either the interviewer or interviewee in the act of being *"helpful"* to one another or through *perceptual distortions and selective perception* (Blimes, 1975; Guba, 1978). Strict adherence and guarded sensitivity was kept to avoid the fact

that some distortions could be *intended to deceive or confuse* (Douglas, 1976). A professional attitude and forebearance was maintained in order to prevent *"going native,"* by building too much trust and rapport thus avoiding going overboard (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). Attention to the details of data-gathering through careful checking of data codes and continuous scrutiny of data for internal and external consistency, triangulation and continuous assessment of respondent credibility was maintained throughout the study.

Initial coding took place by coding the information that could be readily placed into themes that were glaringly apparent from the interviews, observations, and district documents. Other themes that were not readily apparent were derived later when this information, that was not so obvious, was reexamined after having been placed into a separate holding category or ―holding bin‖ until time would allow for closer scrutiny of this material for final coding into one of the existing thematic categories or into a new category.

Initially, the process of data *triangulation* helped to achieve validity through second interviews, observations (Guba, 1981), and multiple and different sources (Denzin, 1978). In addition, a collection of *referential adequacy materials* (Eisner, 1975) such as additional interviews, observations, and documents were assembled and archived for use at the end of the project to test whether the constructions that emerged could be corroborated by them as well (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The selection of a noninvolved professional peer with whom to *debrief* prevented self-doubt of whether or not the study was being kept honest. A record of the meetings, phone calls, and e-mails to the debriefer was logged in another section of the black binder and appropriately tabbed so that they could be consulted later. *Negative case analysis* provided the study with a

manner in which the emerging hypothesis could be refined until a final version of some confidence could be derived (Kidder, 1981). The objective was to account for all known cases without exception, while being fully aware that deriving a perfectly significant statistical finding at the .000 level would be almost impossible to do in the actual study so a working hypothesis was formulated to fit a reasonable number of cases (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility for the study was established through continuous *member checks* to verify that the findings and interpretations resulted in meaningful constructions to authenticate the work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The issue of *transferability* was addressed through the relevant wide ranging descriptive data base resulting from the completion of the study. The *thick description* enables other interested researchers to reach a conclusion about whether a transfer can be contemplated or held with regard to other contexts or the same context at some other time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, the criterions of *dependability and confirmability* were established through audits and the audit trails. The confirmability audit assessed the extent to which the data and interpretations of the study were grounded in events rather than personal constructions. The dependability audit determined the extent to which early closure was resisted, accountability was maintained for all data, and exploration of all reasonable areas took place. In addition, the dependability audit assessed to what degree practical constraints impinged on the study, and the extent to which negative as well as positive data emerged. All of these safeguards were documented in the methodological log in order to establish or generate confidence in the study.

A major reason for using qualitative methodology in this study is the fact that this methodology is conducive to the emergence of certain concepts and information. In addition, the process of *triangulation* might produce a convergence of results while *complementary* information could result from the overlapping of different facts of a phenomenon as it emerged in sequentially related discoveries (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Another advantage of utilizing qualitative methodology is that the study could *developmentally* unfold where the first phase of the study could lend itself to being used to sequentially set up the groundwork or background for the second phase of the study. Also, *initiation* might occur as contradictions result due to the new and different perspectives as they emerge. Finally, *expansion* takes place as these techniques inherent to this research method add scope and breadth to a study.

Entry into the Study Site

The research was conducted during the week of November 28, 2004 through December 3, 2004. Access to the site was gained on June 8, 2004 through written permission from the school superintendent with the campus principal and staff meeting beforehand to agree that they would be willing participants to the study. Campus personnel were contacted the Friday before with an additional phone call the following Monday morning to get further directions to the study site. The campus principal contact was also made advising of the impending visit.

Arrival at the campus entailed an introduction with the principal‘s secretary. Even though the principal anticipated the visit, he had been called to an emergency meeting with the superintendent and was not available the rest of the day. Only the principal could authorize access to campus documents that were needed for the study, but his secretary stated that he had

given her permission to make any documents needed for the study available as needed and to make copies if requested. The secretary was helpful and provided a daily bell schedule that included teacher names, subjects taught, and room numbers. Teachers were excited and looking forward to meeting during the teacher roundtable session. The prevailing schedule necessitated that the roundtable and teacher interviewing sessions be scheduled during the afternoons. The morning session lasted from 8:20 a.m. through 12:00 p.m. and was divided to accommodate four class periods with lunch being served from 12:00 p.m. through 1:00 p.m. The morning time was clearly encumbered by the teachers and students while they were in classroom sessions. In addition, the students and teachers had morning breakfast in their classrooms from 8:00 a.m. through 8:20 a.m. Thus having access to these participants would not be possible during the morning sessions.

The afternoon session lasted from 1:00 p.m. through 3:30 p.m. and appeared to be much more flexible. This time was set aside for individual help or tutorials for students needing to meet with their teachers for additional help. So if students did not understand the material or curricular content from their morning classes they were encouraged to attend the afternoon session as well. It was during the afternoon session that the students could request additional materials in order to accelerate their learning as they individually paced themselves through their required work contracts. The afternoon sessions allowed that students receive additional one-on-one help from the instructors because most of the other students did not return during this time. This teacher-student ―tutorial‖ time was strictly on a voluntary basis with students deciding if they wanted to return for additional help, go home, or go on to their part-time jobs. Thus, a

decision to conduct the taped interviews during the afternoon sessions meant working in or scheduling teachers at their convenience. Care was taken not to intervene at any time that a student required the teacher's active participation in their studies. At times, it was necessary to conduct interviews after this afternoon session had concluded as to not interfere with the teacher and student one-to-one assistance that was required during this time.

Study Site: Day One

The first day turned out to be productive after all. Initial contact with the teachers during the campus roundtable session was made, the *Prior On-Site Questionnaire* along with the consent forms were passed out, and a tentative weekly schedule indicating times for teacher interviews with open sessions to work in student interviews was formulated. The schedule incorporated small break times of between five and ten minutes between the sessions. These small breaks provided a change to prepare for the next scheduled interviewee. The first afternoon concluded with a campus tour conducted by some of the teachers that wanted to indicate just where their classrooms were and how these were conducive to the delivery of individualized instruction for the students. The teachers also indicated where they thought would be the best place to sit and take notes while in their brief descriptions of what to expect students to do as they entered the classroom and why some would go to one center versus another center.

The first day, entailed finding a small local copy center in order to pay for all of the copies made while at the study site. Luckily, it was only down the street and not too far away. However, the school's copier was utilized to make copies of confidential documents such as the October 2004 TAKS results. The appropriate compensation in the form of a donation to the

―Coffee Money‖ fund was made in lieu of paying the school for the copies that were made. Schools are notorious for always being short of coffee funds and although the secretary insisted that it was alright, she accepted this form of compensation for the paper used. It was an ethical thing to do.

Study Site: Day Two

The following day, Tuesday, November 29, 2004, the *Prior On-Site Questionnaires* and the consent forms were received from the teachers. A meeting was held with the principal and he authorized the PEIMS clerk to provide any information that I might need. In keeping with the design of the study, he instructed the PEIMS clerk to provide the names of students that were in their second semester in the alternative education program, meaning that they must have been at the alternative education campus since the previous Spring of 2004. The student roster was utilized to randomly select students to interview. The PEIMS clerk was requested to provide a number between 1 and 10. She selected the number 8, so every eighth student on the list was selected until a total of 10 randomly selected students were compiled for participation in the study. Once this was done, student consent forms went hand delivered to the selected students and the study moved forward by proceeding with the teacher interviews scheduled for that afternoon.

Study Site: The Rest of the Week

The rest of the week consisted of administrators, students and teachers being worked into the interview schedule. It became apparent that the interviewing schedule would have to be readily

flexible to accommodate the teachers and students as their prior commitments and other impromptu events became immediate priorities for them. The afternoons were intensive, but time for lunch in the cafeteria to observe daily student behaviors and interactions was readably available within the schedule. A visit with the principal during the lunch period was fitting as he made it a point to do cafeteria duty each day. Additional time was used to conduct classroom observations in each of the teacher‘s classrooms. These observations lasted from 20 to 25 minutes duration, much like what a normal walk-though would consist of for any administrator on any regular campus. During the week, student interviews were conducted in one of the vacant teachers‘ lounges at the other end of the campus and sometimes the principal‘s office was utilized since he spent most of the week in meetings at the central office. Students were afforded privacy in order to maintain promises of confidentiality and anonymity.

Almost, all of the teachers chose to have their interviews conducted in their classrooms. Sometimes there would be one or two students present and the teachers would take the time to pause during ongoing interviews to help set the incoming students up to computers, provide them with books, or other supplementary materials.

Study Site: Subsequent Visit

One teacher made arrangements to have her interview conducted at her home on Sunday, December 5, 2004 after the conclusion of the study week. She was thankful that this arrangement could be done as she felt much more comfortable in the surroundings of her home. A subsequent visit or return to the study site was once again made on January 14, 2004, to interview the previous principal and one additional teacher that had become ill on the afternoon

of her scheduled interview during the week of my on-site visit. She too, was thankful to be included in the study.

A scheduled interview with the Director of Instructional Services did take place due to a medical emergency on her part. This was her first absence within the district in years and being the professional that she was reputed to be, she called from her doctor‘s office to apologize. This central office or district contact person insisted that an interview with the ex-AEP principal be conducted because this individual had at one time been the Director of Instructional Services, too. In addition, this ex-principal had been crucial to the implementation and subsequent success of the alternative education program. The Director also felt that since she had only held her position within the last two years, that the person with the most pertinent information about the AEP would be the ex-principal who had been responsible for setting up the alternative program since its‘ inception. Arrangements were made to interview the ex-principal who agreed to meet for the interview at the alternative education campus later in the day. Visitation to the study site concluded after interviewing the ex-principal late that afternoon.

Study Site: Participant Exclusions

During the week of the study site, a determination was made not to interview the counselor, the PEIMS clerk, and the new assistant principal as each had only been on the campus for a period of three months or less. Each of these individuals had come on board in September of 2004, while the study was conducted at the end of November 2004.

In addition, a decision was also made not to interview the teacher in charge of the unit for the Severe and Profound students. This program was merely situated on the same campus as the alternative education program being studied. However, a visit was made to her classroom under the auspices of conducting a classroom observation at teacher request. She was very gracious and hospitable and insisted on proudly showing off the quality work that she was carrying out with her students, too. This visit was made to acknowledge that she too was a viable faculty member on the campus being studied. However, this classroom visit or the observations made were not made part of this study.

The research design made it imperative that the particular teachers that had been instrumental in helping the campus achieve a TEA rating of *Commended,* while registered under the Office of Alternative Education Programs (OAEP) during the 2001-02 school years be interviewed. Subsequently, all seven teachers or 100% of the alternative education teaching staff were interviewed. Of these teachers, six had been with the alternative education program since before the 2001-02 school-year and had worked together for many years in the alternative school setting. Only one of the teachers was new to the campus and was in her second year as an instructor, but she too was interviewed.

Study Site: Student Participants

Of the 10 randomly selected students for this study, 5 or 50% of the students that brought back a signed permit from their guardian or parents were interviewed. Of the five students not interviewed, one did not wish to participate or be included in the study at all. One other student did wish to participate in the study, but could not because the parent did not ever sign the

parental permit. The student insisted that he was of age and that he did not need to have parental consent because he was living on his own. Two other students did not have access to their parents or guardians all week. One set of grandparents spent the week in San Antonio, while another young man could not access his father who was on the road as a truck driver. One other parent denied his son permission to participate. A call was made to this parent to come in for a conference, but he failed to show at the appointed time. He sent messages with his son that he would come in for the conference on two other occasions, but again failed to show up much to the dismay of his son who wanted to participate. The research design for this study clearly stated that all students needed to provide a signed parental consent form in strict adherence to ethical social science research practices.

Conclusion

This case study attempted to build a holistic picture or concept of what practices were perceived to be working or considered to be effective in a public alternative education program rated as *Commended* under the criteria established by the Agency's Registered Alternative Education Program. The study utilized methodology that fostered the gathering of broad-based data from student, teacher, administrative, and parent interviews, and through observations, and written documents.

Thus, Chapter III included the detailed methodological framework for completing this study. Chapter IV provides a detailed synopsis of the findings at the study site by presenting the thematic interpretations that seemed apparent from the initial information that was obtained via the *Prior On-Site Questionnaire* for the teachers. Chapter IV also addresses the findings of the

three research questions and interpretation of student characteristics. Finally, Chapter V restates the purpose of the study, the research questions, gives a brief summary of the research process, and addresses the major findings by research question, connections to the literature, and delineates conclusions and implications for educational practice and further research.

Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

The chapter begins by presenting the findings of the *Prior-On-Site Campus Questionnaire: The Participant's Background in Education* in an effort to reveal some of the preliminary themes that seemed apparent from this initial survey. The findings of this study are described in two major sections; first, emergent themes resulting from the *Prior-On-Site Questionnaire*; second, apparent themes addressing each specific research question. Finally, Chapter IV concludes with implications for educational practice and recommendations for future studies that may be conducted in the area of alternative education programs.

Preliminary Themes

Once the participants gave their permission to be part of the study, they were asked to complete the *Prior On-site Questionnaire*: *The Participants' Background in Education.* This initial questionnaire was used as a point of reference or as a means to ground a firm perspective of the personnel or participants at the research site. These initial responses served as a means to ―break the ice‖ with the participants once individual face-to-face contact was made with them. Most importantly, this questionnaire provided information as to why these administrators, teachers, and other staff members chose to work with students that had already dropped out of school. The questionnaire provided these individuals with an opportunity to give short written responses

about what they considered to be positive aspects about working in the alternative education program. The themes that emerged from the *Prior On-site Questionnaire* indicated that administrators, teachers, and campus staff reported that the alternative education setting benefited both students and teachers.

Benefits for Students

The alternative education program provided the students with some of the following benefits. Students were provided individualized attention in the form of one-to-one help as needed. A teacher wrote that for her it meant, ―Helping students on an individual basis or helping students that have a difficult time in a regular classroom setting.‖ (T3: IONSI, pg. C) Students also had the opportunity to complete their work in a self-paced manner. One teacher added that, ―The AEP allows the student to make progress quickly because they work at their own pace thus their progress is in their own hands.‖ (T1: IOSI, pg. C) Another teacher felt that, ―Students and teachers feel like we accomplish more because subjects and the students move at a faster pace.‖ (T4: IOSI, pg. C) The completion of the course work at the AEP also lead students to vocations or advanced post-secondary education. One respondent stated that one of the positive things about working at the AEP was that it gave her the ―Opportunity to help students look for ways to continue their education by way of scholarships.‖ (SDY: IOSI, pg. C) The current principal wrote, ―It's great to have students come back after finishing higher education-two or four year degrees.‖ (P1: IOSI, pg. C) Students are able to free up their day to carry out family and work expectations through flexible scheduling. One teacher added, ―Student works at their own pace, individual lectures, and a flexible schedule for students.‖ (T7: IOSI, pg. C)

Teacher and Staff Benefits

Participants reported the following positive aspects for teachers and staff members who worked at the alternative education program. The teachers felt that their work with the AEP was intrinsically rewarding and their efforts with students gave them much satisfaction. One administrator noted that working at the AEP meant, ―The opportunity to work with students who need that extra attention to become successful.‖ (T1: IONI, pg. C) The same administrator stated, ―Once a student experiences success, it is rewarding to see them graduate and become successful citizens.‖ (T1: IOSI, pg. C) One of the respondents, a staff member, used the word ―opportunity‖ repeatedly to describe how she felt about working at the AEP, ―Opportunity to steer students in the right direction, the opportunity of being a positive role model to the students, and the opportunity to help students look for ways to continue their educations by means of scholarships to the local universities.‖ (SDY: IOSI, pg. C) The teachers indicated that they had more opportunities to address student needs in innovative ways so their working at the AEP provided them with creative academic flexibility. According to one of the respondents, ―There is a lot of flexibility. You can have (sometimes), like in my case, (have) two subjects being taught in the same period. The student follows his or her own contract.‖ (T4: IOSI, pg. C) Another teacher added what working at the AEP meant for him, ―I am able to apply all creative abilities to the job. I sometimes meet with former students and see how they manage to get on with life in spite of personal difficulties. I am able to correct lack of skills.‖ (T5: IOSI, pg. C) Teachers also indicated that working with fewer numbers of students in smaller class sizes facilitated

instruction and reduced stress. One teacher noted that the educational setting meant, ―Less pressure - classes are smaller - we work in an easy, comfortable, but at the same time challenging environment.‖ (T4: IOSI, pg. C) The smaller class sizes and number of students also provided the teachers with opportunities to teach character education: According to teachers, it was acceptable to broach discussions with students involving ethical and moral behavior. Teaching moral responsibility came to light with statements that indicated that teachers conscientiously made it a point to broach the subject of what it meant to be morally responsible. One teacher shared that he took the time for, ―Teaching moral responsibility, the work ethic, and Christian values whenever possible.‖ (T3: IONI, pg. C) Finally, a by-product of the small campus and smaller class size allowed the teachers time to foster academic relationships. According to teachers, having opportunities to really get to know the students as human beings contributed to building academic relationships. The academic setting found within the AEP allowed or was conducive to fostering positive relationships between the students and their teachers. One teacher wrote that, ―The AEP allows for a closer academic relationship between the instructor and student.‖ (T1: IOSI, pg. C)

Summary: Prior-On-Site Interview

Administrators, teachers, and staff reported through written responses on the *Prior-On-site Questionnaire* that the AEP benefited students by providing them with individualized attention, self-paced work, academic transition, and flexible scheduling. These respondents also indicated that the AEP afforded teachers and staff some work related benefits such as intrinsically

rewarding work, creative academic flexibility, smaller class sizes, opportunities to teach character education, as well as the time to foster academic relationships with the students.

Question One

What are the characteristics of the Grade 9-12 students who have dropped out and later returned to school to complete their studies in a selected alternative education program?

After student interviews were transcribed and coded, the salient characteristics of students that returned to complete their studies within the alternative education program emerged. The students tended to be economically disadvantaged. All of the students who attended the AEP were on free or reduced lunch. In the state of Texas, if a student qualifies for free or reduced lunch, they are automatically considered to be economically disadvantaged. District documents and the campus principal corroborated that, ―All students are economically disadvantaged. (P1: 13; 36).

In addition, some of the students became teen parents early in their lives or were going to be parents. For instance, one student had two children and one more on the way. Some of the girls interviewed had experienced unplanned pregnancies or miscarriages and those that did have children had childcare issues that prevented them from attending on a regular basis. As one of the students explained:

> I was pregnant, but I had a miscarriage and I had to quit work and all that stuff…and I came here when I was...because I knew, my sister came here when she was pregnant and (the previous principal) was the one who started the school. She had been a pregnant

> teen and she thought it would help. So I wanted to come here for that also, but…mostly I came because I was behind. (S4: 22; 39-43) The day before I came here, I had the miscarriage. (S4: 22; 2).

Another one of the students had continuously dealt with her baby‘s ongoing health issues and hospitalizations. At the time of the study, she had just returned from truancy court for failure to attend on a regular basis. Her baby had experienced numerous hospitalizations due to complications from asthma and had been interned a total of five to six times during the previous semester. She prepared herself for the court date and took all of documentation from the hospital stays to prove to the judge that she had not been willfully absent, but rather had to tend to her baby‘s needs. She stated:

> I missed a lot of days, but I have some excuses too. I went to court the other day… this week. And I took my excuses. I brought them to school and they made copies so I just took the original ones to court. And I didn‘t have to pay for court costs or anything. So I really didn‘t have nothing (sic) to worry about. It‘s because my baby‘s always in the hospital. I didn‘t get fined, I didn‘t get probation. They let me go because it‘s not that…I don‘t….want to miss school it‘s because my baby‘s always sick. (S1: 10; 10-28)

The students tended to be academically challenged and course work was difficult for them to accomplish because students reported that they had learning disabilities or that they knew that they needed extra help because they had failed to be promoted during their academic careers.

Some students shared that they had previously received special education services while in the elementary or middle school levels, but that they had been dismissed through the ARD process. Some noted that they knew that they needed special education services, but had never been referred or tested to see if they qualified for these services. One Hispanic male student stated

that he did not qualify for any type of help with his studies while at the high school because he was not special education and his teachers kept telling him that he was too smart for special education. When asked if he received one-one-one help at the high school, he responded: ―No, because I would have to get on this special education and you have to qualify and they thought I was like smart and you know, I've been to class…CM (content mastery). (S3: 7; 35-46). Earlier during the interview he had stated, ―Yeah, kind of I was too smart, and I wasn't. I was struggling in school that's why I came over here. And I'm working at my own pace now. (S3: 89; 5-6). He voiced how he felt about the fact that he could have continued at the high school, ―I would have been really struggling in the high school…and just really struggling trying to get up there. Start from the bottom.‖ (S3: 23; 40-41) The principal corroborated that this student probably needed special education services, ―One kid, he's not (in special education)...he would probably qualify, but he works so hard that boy, works so hard.‖ (P1: 22: 1-7)

Another Hispanic female student knew she had been in special education when she had been in Grade 6, ―I didn't know how to read back then. I guess that's why they put me in there. I don't know. I was in there for a couple of years. I got out fast.‖ (S1: 13; 2-22). She had been dismissed from the program through ARD and had attended content mastery for additional help with her course work while at the high school. (S1:23; 34-40).

One student reported the following:

> Yes, I failed the first grade and I guess you could say that I fell behind or something like that. And then I failed my freshman year. Then I came over here and I got in as a sophomore and then by the end of that I had finished. By the end of May I was a junior already. And this year, I started a junior and already a senior. So it worked fast, it really did.

Students also reported that they were responsible to their immediate families because they helped to support the families in whatever way they could. Some students cared for ailing parents that were going through illnesses or hospitalizations. One student shared:

> She (my mom) baby sits a little girl. And she (mom) had broken her arm, they had to put a rod in her arm and she can't move it. She can only move this part; she can't like do her arm up. So she needs help taking the little girl her bath and cooking for her. She can't cook with one hand. So, I go home early. (S4: 11; 16-19)

One more female student told of how:

> You know I would have finished. But sometimes I feel like I want to just…like be through. Like I don't want to go to school anymore. Sometimes I have (had) those days at (the high school). But over here, I don't really have those days. Because, I mean, more help, less time in school, and I kind of did it …to… like for the job too. So, I can get a job after school, help my mom out at home with the groceries and stuff (S5: 11; 39-43).

Some of the students were self-supporting and worked part-time to not only support themselves, but to help their immediate families. The students worked long hours in the evening or even into the night. One Hispanic female student was working at Burger King, eight hours a day with two to three days off. She was going in to work at 3:00 a.m. in the morning and earning about two hundred dollars weekly. She shared the following:

> They trained me for a lot of things. Like drive thru, counter, and the back, doing the burgers. And just, now they're training me how to do the inventory for ordering stuff. They think that I should become manager, like assistant manager and things like that. (S2: 5; 1-29)

Another Hispanic female student said:

> I worked for Whataburger for a while, then I had to quit or whatever because of things that happened. And we have a big family, it's me and I have four older sisters, an older brother, and three half-brothers. I'm the youngest. (S4; 1; 7-10)

Some of the students had been subject to disciplinary actions while at the high school. They reported that they had suffered through bullying and consequently been involved in fights, been ticketed and fined, and had either been suspended to the home or temporarily removed from the high school to the DAEP. One Hispanic female stated:

> I had a lot of trouble in high school. Like, they jumped me all the time. I'd always be getting too sad…always getting suspended from school. I got kicked out of school for a while. I just stole a bunch of stuff, so I got….I (thought that if I) came over here everything would stop. But, it's still going on. But I'm still here at the school, trying to get away from anything like that. (S2: 2; 40-43)

She went on to clarify:

> Everything's still going on at the high school, but they let the kids from over there transfer over here, and you know, it's like, I didn't think they would let (just) anybody come over here, you know, that is, (I thought that only) certain people could be attending here. (S2: 3; 14-16) They are sometimes in the same classes with me. I ignore them, I don't listen to them say anything to me, I just do my work. I'm just trying to get out of school. (S2: 3; 31-32)

Another female student added:

> I got into a fight and I got cited. I got a citation for $150. And then I got suspended and I had to go to SAG and then she (the other student) started another fight with me so I got another citation. (S4: 4; 22-24) We got another citation for another $150. So I had to pay $300 and my mom and dad didn't want to pay. So I had to do community service at the landfill. (S4: 4; 32-33).

Students at the AEP were challenged in their attempts to pass the state assessments. Some had already failed the TAAS or TAKS Exit level Math, Reading, Science, or Social Studies while at the high school. Some of the students shared that they had failed one or more times in their academic careers due to poor academic performance. One Hispanic female student reported that she would do well on the next round of TAKS tests. She stated:

> Yeah, because now they made a new law that says that if you don't pass the TAKS test, that means, you know, they consider you as a drop out. Even though you have all your credits and everything, you know. They consider you as a dropout. That's the first thing I'm going to do (pass the TAKS). (S1: 24; 24-27)

The students attending the AEP were familiar with the consequences of dropping out. Many already knew what life without a high school diploma meant from personal experience, or experiences of their siblings, peers, or parents. One student's boyfriend was a former high school dropout who did graduate from the alternative education program two years prior to the on-site study. (S1: 2; 15-37) One female student shared:

> If I don't finish school, then I can't go over there (to college) can't get a good job. I'm going to be a loser, I don't want to be loser. I want to have a good job. I want to make money and have my own home. They usually tell me that…if you want to be someone in life. (S4: 17: 2-5)

Another student shared how she felt about dropouts:

> Like when I see dropouts, like… and they're still young like 18 or 17 year olds, I do kind of feel bad for them, like there is a school like… that can (help) people and stuff. Instead of being on GED. Yeah, GED is good, but it's not worth everything. A high school diploma is like worth your whole life.

The students demonstrated self-motivation or a personal inner drive to finish their high school studies and attend post-secondary training at one of the local two or four-year college institutions. Some were planning to enroll in programs leading to certification in a specific profession. One student stated:

> I‘ve been in another city, another state, and missed school. I have my dad and I stay now with my family, and my dad and my brother. My school now, my address here now is the (alternative) school. And I just come to school full time for right now and later on I‘m going to get a good job. (S3; 1; 7-10) Yes, I am looking for a job, but….I came over here because, so I could better myself…and get higher education. First of all, I would like to finish up and graduate here. And go get that good job with that diploma. (S3: 1; 24-39)

This student had come to the AEP, ―to better himself.‖(S3: 1; 24-39) Other students had made conscious choices to attend the alternative education program after parents, siblings, peers, or counselors advised them to enroll. One student stated, ―Just like my family members… they always tell me that it was good for me to come…that I‘ll be able to catch up with my work and my grades. (S1: 20; 45-46). She went on to say, ―It is important that I be here at this point of my life, so I can finish school, so I can learn more.‖(S1: 24; 42-45) Sometimes students made the choice to attend the AEP because they were already parents with responsibilities. This same student stated, ―I understand that I am here because of my baby and then because I want to graduate faster.‖ (S1: 14; 17-18) The only male student in the student in the study was already a parent and he added:

> Well, with me, I‘m getting my education…and going to college saves me, helps them (my children). I‘m helping myself…and that‘s how it should be …helping them. But if I

> don‘t get an education, I won‘t get…that‘s not going to help them, so I‘m being supportive and going to school and bettering myself to go to college and get a great job. (S3: 17; 42-45).

One student aspired to be in the entertainment business:

> I either want to go into acting. Someone just famous. I just want to be someone famous, someone on TV, just. I do a lot of fashion stuff, like modeling and things like that. Like I want to get into that. That‘s what I want to (do) go for school, to school for. And I hope, I go to California and stay there.

This last student had already looked up a fashion school on the internet and had found one in California. They had sent her information on the school along with an application. ―Well, after I graduate I can apply, because they told me….and the booklet and how to get there and what‘s…like what I have to do, you know. How much money and stuff to have. (S2: 18; 10-37)

Students were, at time, confronted with multiple setbacks when they had more than one factor that kept them from continuing their high school studies. These personal setbacks were usually time consuming to address or were beyond their ability to handle, especially if students did not have the resources or experience in dealing with these multiple factors.

One example of such a case was a student who had to deal with multiple challenges during a short period of time. She recounted:

> I came to the school like, last year I came. I worked at Whataburger for a while, then I had to quit for whatever… because of things that happened. (S4: 1; 7-10) I‘d fallen real behind and I heard this would help me. This school you know. (S4: 1; 43) I was a cashier and I worked from 5:00 till 10:00, Monday thru Friday. (S4: 3; 42)

She stated that she had dropped out of the high school due to her poor academic performance mainly because of her late working hours. She had also become pregnant, but had miscarried (S4: 22; 39-43). She stated that during this time, she felt like no one listened to her at the high school so she dropped out. At the time of the study, she was leaving the AEP early because her mom had suffered a broken arm and the student was needed at home to help her mother care for a child that she babysat in the home. (S4: 11; 16-19) Due to the overwhelming disruptions in this student's life, she eventually transferred to the AEP where she had been attending since her sophomore year.

So this particular student had been self-supporting by holding a part-time job in the evening, had already dropped out due to poor academic performance, had become pregnant, had miscarried, and was taking care of a mom with a broken arm and helping her parent to care for a small child to help support themselves, too.

Summary: Characteristics of Dropouts

The characteristics describing the students attending this particular AEP indicate that the students in this study tended to be economically disadvantaged, teen parents, academically challenged, responsible to their families, self-supporting, subject to disciplinary actions, challenged by state assessments, familiar with the consequences of dropping out, self-motivated, and at times, confronted by multiple setbacks that prevented them from completing their high school studies..

Question Two

What are the reasons that returning students give for making a decision to enroll in a selected alternative education program?

Participating students revealed some of the reasons that they had for returning back to an alternative education program to complete their high school educations. These reasons can be categorized as follows: school, personal, or family related reasons.

School Related Rationale

The students conveyed how there were several structures within the AEP that appealed to them and were conducive to their academic success.

The structure of the school day, flexible scheduling, at the AEP allowed the students to hold part-time jobs and still be able to assist their classes. A student stated that she liked the fact that there was flexibility in the times the classes were scheduled that afforded her time to hold a part-time job. One student related how she would drop off her baby at the day care each morning. Then she would go to the Focus class between 7:30 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. where she would check in with the teacher for purposes of attendance and to have breakfast that usually consisted of cereal, or tacos, or pizza (S1: 5; 36). ―I drop off the baby in the day care, (then) if I have time, I go eat in Mrs._ class and then I go to class to work.‖ (S1: 5; 10-11) Then she would proceed to four other classes that addressed Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science. Her school day was finished by 11:30 so she could proceed to the cafeteria to have lunch and then return for the afternoon Tutorial sessions that were open to any student. These started at

12:00 p.m. ―Tutoring, they tutor you. They can help you.‖ (S1; 6; 11-12). Students that had a part-time job usually left immediately after their last class or after having lunch.

The students were aware from information that they had from family, friends, siblings, and peers that they could receive the specialized or individualized help that they needed to graduate. One student's high school friends informed him about the AEP and told him, ―Hey, man, go over there to the AEP and you know you can work at your own pace and you can move up in life, you know. Just do your work and you'll be up there in life, it's at your own pace. (S3: 2; 27-39) The student made a decision to enroll at the AEP when he realized that he could not keep up with the work demands at the high school and that in order to get the help that he needed he would have to qualify for special education through a lengthy process. ―I was struggling in school…that's why I came over here. And I'm working at my own pace now (S3: 8; 5-6).‖ He further states that he liked school now and didn't think he needed special education and was planning to finish up his high school course credits at the AEP (S3: 8: 14-16). The student also likes the one-to-one help that he is receiving at the AEP. ―They help me one-one. That's what I like about this school…because they help me one-on-one…and there at the high school they don't. That's why I came here to the AEP.‖ (S3: 3; 10-12)

One female student described herself as being a student that made mostly A's and B's and had good attendance, a good student from a good family. (S5: 1; 1-8) She stated, ―because I was having trouble with Math and I thought when I came here it would be better so I could be more focused…because there are less students and I thought it would be easier. The teachers can work one-on-one with you here, not like the regular school. That's what I think, so that's why I'm

here at the alternative school.‖ (S5: 1; 31-36) She stated that she had a friend who was attending the AEP who told her about it. The friend explained that the AEP was not necessarily easier, but that it was all about getting more help.

> So I figured that I could get more help. That's why I came here. She told me about it. (S5: 2; 2-4) There is more help. Over there (at the high school) it's way more kids than it is here. It's way more kids at the high school. And being… that it's way more, like (there are way) less kids here (at the AEP so) then it's easier to get the help that you need. So that's the difference to me.‖ (S5: 4; 23-25)

Another female student related:

> Like you don't have homework …sometimes. You don't have to be carrying notebooks or you just keep (it) in the classroom to do your work. The computers they use are A-Plus. (S1: 10; 2-4) No, we don't get homework. If …we choose to take homework (S1: 11; 46)…you don't have to. We are allowed to take it home, catch up and bring it back when we (return) are absent. (S1: 12; 6-9)

She was also happy that she would be receiving immediate feedback for the work that she turned in-_immediate feedback graded on site.' (S1: 4; 8-46) This student went on to say that if she could talk to people about the AEP she would tell them:

> That it's a good school, you know. That you can work at your own pace. It's not like high school that you know you finish a class in one semester…but at the AEP you can finish a class in two weeks. (S1: 9; 38-40).

The classes at the AEP were smaller so they had fewer students than those found in a typical high school classroom. One student described what a larger classroom environment meant for her:

> You ask for help at (the high school), most of the time they couldn't help you one-on-one. They had to help everybody at the same time. And I need somebody to like sit there

> and explain it to me so that I can see it and know what to do. And here they do that for you. (S4: 6; 44-46)

This same student had become so serious about her work that she would walk straight from one class to the other and not spend any time in the hallway. She noted,

> I don‘t like to stand out there. When I get to my class I like to start my work right away because I want to try and finish this year…because this is my graduation year. And I want to try and finish by May. (S4: 6; 10-12, 16)

She stated that she could concentrate much better in the smaller classes that had plenty of room or space to move around in and that if she had stayed at the high school she would probably not be graduating because she had fallen so far behind. This would have meant that she would have had to attend the high school for an additional year. This thought did not make her happy. She stated, ―My purpose for being here. I need to graduate. This is helping me. The school is helping me. It helps me a lot. I need to be here. (S4: 17; 19-20) When she was asked, ―If you weren‘t here, where would you be?‖ She replied, ―In class and upset at the (local high school). (S4:17: 22) When she was asked if she thought she could have graduated with her class at the local high school, she responded, ―I don‘t think I would have because over there it‘s the whole year. Here at the AEP you do everything as fast as you want o, as slow as you want to. Over there it takes a whole year to finish a class. It‘s not like that here. (S4: 17; 36-36)

Students at the AEP took advantage of the parenting and childcare center that was located on the campus. Students reported that as teen parents they needed childcare, transportation, and parenting classes. The AEP provided the teen parents and their babies van transportation to and

from the alternative program. Once there, the students could place their children in the daycare center and later during the day the students could attend the PEP program and receive parenting classes on how to care for their children. One of the students shared that she had enrolled at the AEP because she was pregnant and Homebound services were available at the campus to support her through her pregnancy in case she needed to stay home. ―The only reason that I came here was because I was pregnant.‖ (S1:1; 14) Another reason that this student decided to enroll at the AEP is because she could drop the baby off in the child care center available at the AEP and the campus then provided breakfast for her consisting of cereal, tacos, or pizza each morning before attending her first class at 7:30 a.m.. (S1: 5; 2-36) ―I probably wouldn't be coming to school. I would've dropped out, but I wouldn't be coming to school like every day. I would have to be struggling to find a babysitter.‖ (S1:12; 18-20) One student related:

> Here they help you a lot with the babies, they have the day care. The Home economics teacher helps a lot. Say if you need to go like to the doctor or something, if you need if you need a ride, people with children need a ride to school. They have a van that picks them up and brings t hem to school and stuff like that. (S5: 16; 11-14)

There were no known drug use problems at the AEP with regard to use of illegal or prohibited substances. The students heard this from other students so this encouraged them to apply at the AEP. Each of the students in this study vehemently affirmed that there had not been any problems with other students being suspended or removed for being in control or under the influence of an illegal substance. One student responded by saying, ―Might be kids that do it at home, but not at school.‖ (S5: 15; 41) Another student admitted to hearing about students smoking cigarettes:

> Oh, I‘ve never seen drug use, but I‘ve heard about other people doing drugs, like smoking behind the school, on the side, but I‘ve never seen it.‖ (S1: 22; 18-22) (S1: 22; 16-19) —Because drugs ain‘t allowed in the school. They can close the school down or something.‖ (S1: 22: 28-29)

Students expressed wanting to attend a school that felt safe and where people were nice to one another. A safe school climate appealed to them and they were able to concentrate on their studies. Some of the students had become tired of the bullying issues prevalent at the high school, so they made a conscious decision to drop out and continue in the AEP because they had become aware that it had a much different school climate. One student that had been involved in several fights and had at one time been removed to the DAEP shared how she felt about everything she had suffered at the high school,

> I never got a chance for after school activities. I really did want to be in sports and stuff. I just really,..I just really had people get to me, I guess. I let the people get to me and I didn‘t really focus on what I wanted to do. (S2: 4; 7-19)

This same student ended up enrolling at the AEP is because one of the counselors at the campus had interviewed her to find out why she wanted to attend the program. The student remembers being told that if she needed time to do her work then the alternative school would allow her to do just that (S2:2: 13-14). Her personal perception of the AEP was that:

> It‘s easier here. It‘s really, really easier. It keeps you really focused. There are not a lot of students around you. They don‘t really talk to you. Everyone‘s always on their work and minding their own business…just finishing school. Now a lot of people do graduate fast here. I think because they have no one to just poke at them. They‘re just on their own.‖ (S2: 9; 20-28)

One other female student also mentioned that safety was a concern for her at the high school:

> There‘s a lot of drama at the high school…a lot of drama. Everybody‘s talking about everybody. There‘s a lot of gossip. It‘s crazy. Everybody‘s always trying to fight somebody. Here everybody minds their own business. Nobody messing with anybody. (S4: 3; 16-18) I wanted to get over it, we‘re in high school. We don‘t need to be…fighting. (S4:4; 8-14)

As students obtained information about the AEP, they realized that they could make progress at their own pace. The AEP was structured so that the students could complete their work in a self-paced manner. Students had heard that the AEP allowed for work to be completed comfortably without rushing or by having teachers demand that it be handed in immediately or at the end of the period.

One student had found out that she could work at her own pace. ―It‘s not like high school that you know, you finish a class in one semester. You can finish a class in two weeks.‖ (S1:9: 38-40) Another female student that was interviewed attended the high school for only one year. She had numerous problems being able to handle the pace of the work and was involved in fights. Some of the students that had caused this student problems at the high school had subsequently also enrolled at the AEP and had tried to start the problems again, but she had been ignoring them. She stated the following about the high school, ―I don‘t know… it wasn‘t for me. It was too…they want everything quick and easy, like done so fast.‖ (S2: 1: 15-17

The student recalled how high schools can be competitive. She added:

> At the high school everyone‘s all…all the teachers are always on you. They push you…they make you turn in everything. It‘s like competition between the high schools and things like that. That‘s the way I see it. (S2:2; 1-5)

The student felt comfortable at the AEP, ―Here it is your own pace. Teachers don‘t rat on you, they don‘t‘ tell you do this, do that. They don‘t …even right there and then. They just want you to take your time.‖ (S2: 4; 1-5) It is obvious that this student felt overwhelmed by the pace of the high school both socially and academically.

The particular student‘s parents had also supported her decision to enroll at the AEP. ―They didn‘t get upset when I wanted to come here, because it‘s an alternative school, you know, and the (high school) is… they‘re both different but they weren‘t upset when I wanted to come over here. They help me out.‖ (S4:9; 24-27) She noted that the AEP was a good school, ―It works. It‘s…you do everything at your own pace, you have… you don‘t have to turn in your work right then that (very) day. You can work on it and think about it. And see what you‘re doing. You don‘t have to do everything right away. It‘s a good school. It helps people catch up.‖ (S4: 5; 43-46)

Personal Related Reasons

Students related how there were several factors that they had contended with while enrolled at the local high school that prevented them from graduating. The students recognized that these factors were obstacles that could be improved or minimized while attending the AEP in order to improve their chances of graduation. At the same time, there were other pressing goals, responsibilities, and factors that compelled them to enroll at the AEP.

Some students expressed that they had been tired of being academically behind at the high school, but they really wanted or had an interest in their own academic success. The students

hoped that the AEP would lessen their academic frustrations. One particular student felt remorse about not having graduated with her high school classmates during the spring of 2004. She stated:

> I was supposed to graduate last year. That was my class, I cried on that day because I didn't graduate with my people. That's who I grew up with… when I was young and went to school all the way with them. And it just, …now I feel like what am I still doing here, like you know, …like I have no business (being) here, I should be in college already. Just things like that, like I always tell myself that all the time. (S2: 16; 38-42)

Another female student conveyed how she was still struggling with Math even at the AEP:

> Like with math especially. (In class, I'm really having problems. I take it home and I do it. My mom helps me with it, or friends that have graduated and know how to do it, they help me with it. (S5: 19; 26-28)

Some students had failed the TAAS or TAKS state tests more than once and enrolling at the AEP gave them the opportunity to pass the State assessments. The student received her TAKS Math exit level scores from the October 2004 administration while the study was being conducted. She had ―messed up again, but I guess if I come up to school and work more, be more focused…‖ (S3: 3; 13-14) Although, she had failed the Math TAKS twice before she was looking forward to working hard to passing it in the spring of 2005. She still felt that the AEP was the best place for her to be because if she had remained at the high school, ―I probably would not be in school.‖ (S5: 18; 38) The male student in the study also shared that he needed to pass both the Writing and the Math (S3: 27; 14-17).

Students expressed being tired of their own erratic and poor attendance at the high school or at the alternative program due to suspensions to the home, personal illnesses, removals to the

DAEP, or because they held part-time jobs or had other responsibilities. The AEP gave students the chance to show that they could be responsible and improve their attendance. One student stated the following about her attendance at the AEP:

> I guess I could (say) it‘s ok. It‘s not all that great, but it‘s ok. Because sometimes I don‘t come when I‘m feeling sick or sometimes I won‘t come if my mom, if nobody‘s there at my house with my mom. So, it‘s not all that great, but it is good. (S4: 12; 16-18)

At the same time she was aware of what could happen if she did not attend:

> Because there‘s a lot of students from the (local high school) that would want to be here and if you‘re not absent… if you‘re absent they can kick you out. If you‘re absent, you know …a whole bunch of times….and this school is good, I don‘t know why they (other students) want to not come here. (S4: 21; 18-20)

She went on to add:

> (The principal) told us, you know… if we miss school we can get kicked out and they have a student at (the local high school) to fill up…you know, the students as they get kicked out. I don‘t want to be kicked out of here. I can‘t..(S4: 21: 29-31)

Students had an idea of what they wanted to do beyond receiving a high school diploma. Many students wanted to pursue both career and other life goals. Visualizing long term career and life goals made the students determined to finish their studies even if it meant having to attend the AEP. One student made the following observation, ―Well, I don‘t think it matters to anybody, it just matters to me…like getting a better job…supporting my family.‖ (S1: 15; 1) This student was fully cognizant of what completing her high school studies meant to her on a personal level. So, for her, graduating from the AEP meant a better job and being able to support her family.

The student also has aspirations of attending a nearby junior college to get her certification as a phlebotomist. (S1: 17; 24-32. She is fully cognizant that in order to do this she must do well at the AEP. The student saw herself five years down the road living in California with her boyfriend, baby, and other family members, ―doing better.‖ (S1: 17; 45 & S1: 18; 1-19)

One student stated, ―You need a diploma to go to college…to get a good job. You know when you go looking for a job they don't want someone that's gonna (sic) not have a diploma, that's going to be a dropout. (S4: 18; 7-10) The student aspired to become a pharmacist and knew that the local college had built a brand new building to house this program. (S4: 19; 13-14). The lone male student in this study hoped to get into a two-year college and had already explored the Reserves by speaking to a recruiter. In the long run he hoped to be ―with a good paying company.‖ (S3: 16; 26-43) (S3: 17; 5-9, 25)

Students that had parents, siblings, or friends talk to them about what it was like to be a dropout from personal experience also had these same individuals encourage them to return back to school so that they could have an opportunity to have a better life. Students wanted to do better so they enrolled at the AEP because they did not want to suffer the consequences of dropping out so they took a proactive step to address this deficiency in their lives.

One student related what being absent meant for her:

> That's what I'm saying…my attendance right now is not all that good. But in the past it's never been like this. It's just my illness right now. That's why. (S5: 17: 37-38) I think it's like, you can be absent up to 8 or 9 days, then they send you a truancy paper, you've got to go to court. I've got to go tomorrow. (S5: 17; 26-33)

This student was dealing with the consequences of being in non-compliance with the compulsory attendance laws by having to resolve the issue through a formal court proceeding. The only parent that participated in the study added, ―I want the best for my son so that he does not have to work as hard as I have had to work. I support the AEP and the teachers there.‖ (PT: 1; 1-5) This parent had also dropped out of school so he made sure to encourage his son to attend each and every day so that he could graduate.

Students were encouraged to attend the AEP because they were already familiar with the principal. He had been their principal during their elementary school days or, once enrolled, he had taken the time to get to know them. One student experienced how supportive the principal could be on a daily basis, ―He just tells me to do good (sic), keep working. He asks me if I'm almost done (S1:8; 11).‖ The only male student in the study stated that he liked his teachers, counselors, and principal at the AEP. ―He's a good man. He's helped me…encouraging me, too…with all the teachers …and he brings me up and he brings me up and he makes me feel good. And he tells me don't give up. You can do it and I believe and I can achieve it.‖ (S3: 3; 39-42)

Another female student reported having great rapport with the principal. He had also been her principal in fifth grade and he was instrumental in getting her into the AEP. Before enrolling at the AEP, she and her mother had talked with the principal. She observed, ―I know him and we talked about it. About the problems I was having with math.‖ (S5: 2; 12-14). She saw the principal as being helpful just like the teachers with whatever problems she might be experiencing. She stated:

> When I was trying to get in, I didn‘t know he was the principal here at first, so I kind of had to look around and then when I talked to him, he was like…you know… he‘s like a nice person. So he was like…‘O.k., I‘ll help you get into the school as long as you keep up with work and stuff.‘ He‘s …I know… he‘s a nice person to talk to. I can talk to him too. He can help me with problems. (S5: 6; 3-7)

Family Related Reasons

Students expressed how their family and personal responsibilities made an impact on their decisions to enroll back in school. They voiced that the AEP would be providing them an opportunity to realize their parenting responsibilities and to undertake familial responsibilities, too. Then they conveyed how their family and friends encouraged them to attend the AEP through their words of encouragement or by being role models for them. The AEP provided students the opportunity to:

Students sensed an urge to complete their studies once they realized that as parents they now had to be responsible and provide for their own children. The student reflects on her role as a student and her future plans by stating, ―I understand that I am here because of my baby and then because I want to graduate faster.‖ (S1: 14; 17-18) The male student in the study believed that he was becoming a role model for his children. He stated that he was attending the AEP so that:

> So I can get a better education. A higher education and a better job and succeed in life. To do good in life.(S3: 16;16-17) Like I‘m a big role model…and they (my children) look up to that and that‘s what they want to be, somebody that‘s going to be somebody. And that‘s what they like. And that‘s what I‘m doing right now. Just being a leader and succeeding in life. Succeeding in life. Just getting up there for my kind (kids). (S3: 24; 5-8).

Students also reported that having family responsibilities compelled them to complete their studies so that they could turn around and financially help their immediate families. One student told of how she decided to enroll at the AEP, ―Because, I mean, more help, less time in school, and I kind of did it to like…for the job too. So I can get a job after school, help my mom out at home with the groceries and stuff.‖ (S5: 11; 39-43) She planned to finish her high school education at the AEP and continue on to cosmetology school within the following six months at a local two-year college. (S5: 12; 17, 40-44) (S5: 13; 21-22) She eventually wanted to own her own business, but she felt that she could not move far away from home because her mother has not been well and she felt that she needed to live with her or be close to her to help her. (S5: 13; 44-46) When the student was asked if she planned to remain in the same town after graduation, she replied:

> Most likely, yes. I really don't want to but I have a lot of family here. My mom's still here and she's kind of sick so I want to be here so I can help her too. If, I move away it would be to Houston or San Antonio. (S5: 13; 44-46)

The students typically had someone in their immediate family such as a parent or one of their siblings who encouraged them to enroll at the AEP. Students experienced both family support and encouragement. An example of this is when one student was encouraged by her mother to enroll at the AEP, she told her daughter, ―If that's what you want, then go ahead and do it, but you have to do it to get out of school.‖ (S2: 2; 34-36) The student knew that her mom understood that she was having a lot of trouble at the high school, ―Because she knew I wasn't going to make it through high school…she tried to find something else for me.‖ (S2:3; 2-3)

Another female student was also motivated to attend by her boyfriend, ―My boyfriend pushed me. I push myself because I want to go to college, but there are some days, like… ahhh,... like I'm really tired of school, but I come.‖ (S1: 14; 7-9) Another student had asked her parents if they might consider allowing her to return to the high school so that she could participate in sports, but she said her parents were happy about her attending the AEP and disagreed that she should go back to the high school for that reason. They told her that she should stay at the AEP, graduate and wait until college where she could once again enjoy participating in sports like she used to in middle school. (S2: 8; 4-30)

Once at the AEP, one male student was encouraged by his teachers, his family, and the principal to keep attending. ―The school is very good for me…and I go home and tell my folks that I'm doing these classes and I'm almost there and they like that and they keep encouraging me to do well.‖ (S3: 4; 25-27)

Students experienced vicarious success when their own siblings or friends had triumphed in finishing their high school diplomas by attending the AEP. These positive examples or role models motivated the students to think that they too could complete their studies in the program, instead of the traditional high school. Even though one female student knew little about the AEP, her boyfriend had graduated from the AEP and he and the high school counselor gave her more information about the benefits of the program (S1: 3; 8). ―I had once go ask (sic) about it and she told me to go apply, to come apply. It took me a long time to get in here.‖ (S1:3; 8-9)

A female student told of how she was the fourth person in her family to attend the AEP. She and her brother and two sisters heard about it from her best friend that enrolled first:

—I had fallen really behind and I needed to catch up. And my sister came, two of my sisters came here and they caught up quickly. And my older brother. I'd fallen real behind and I heard this would help me. This school you know. My friend_____came here before I did. So she let us know, my sisters.

Summary: Student Rationale for Returning

Students that decided to return back to complete their studies in this particular alternative program did so based on several reasons. First of all, the alternative school offered students some school related reasons for returning such as: flexible scheduling, parenting and childcare support, differentiated instruction, small classes, self-paced work, a safe school climate, and a drug free school. Secondly, the AEP also appealed to students on a personal level by giving them: an opportunity to lessen their academic frustrations, pass their state assessments, improve their attendance, pursue career and life goals, and to address the consequences of dropping out. At the same time, students were compelled to feel more at ease about enrolling at the AEP knowing that a familiar principal was running the AEP. Finally, the students had family related reasons for making a decision to enroll at the AEP. These factors were the opportunity to realize parenting responsibilities, to undertake familial responsibilities, to experience family support or encouragement, and to learn from positive role models of student success.

Question Three

What do the students and stakeholders in a selected Texas registered alternative education program perceive as effective practices of the program that encourage students to return and complete their studies?

After, decoding all of the data and tallying the results. Seventeen themes that became apparent from the data disaggregation were combined into five major themes representing the effective practices in the AEP that more than likely led to student success. These four themes encompassed: hiring the right personnel, monitoring academic progress, providing student support service, and maintaining a safe school climate. One additional theme was indicative of the need to promote a positive image of the value of the AEP.

Hiring the Right Personnel

This practice can be defined as hiring the right people to do the best job possible at the AEP so that the students experience success. The practice of hiring just the right personnel to work with the at-risk students at the AEP may have ensured that there was a good job-fit for the demands of working with a challenging student population. The following subthemes related to aspects that would ensure having the personnel with specific qualifications: administrative, teacher and staff training, sense of legacy, empathy, acts of kindness, caring, principal leadership, and work ethic.

Administrative, Teacher, and Staff Training

Training can be any prior or ongoing educational development opportunities, inclusive of skills gained through life experiences or even job related skills outside the field of education. Typically, administrators, teachers, and staff cited their own grounded experiences as being integral to performing their jobs or to carrying out the processes within the AEP that were instrumental in helping the students to succeed academically. These cumulative job-related skills ensured that all faculty and staff were very familiar with the processes and practices that

were in place at the AEP to ensure that students were successful all the way from the admission process to graduation.

Several of the students cited that there was a system or process in place for being admitted into the alternative education campus. There was an application to be filled out, followed by an interview of the student and their parents with the campus principal (S1:3:27). This was a well-known process by the administrators and staff running the AEP about what to do in his absence; for example, when the principal was not present, the secretary followed through with the same process on his behalf. Subsequently, all students enrolling at the AEP was interviewed and inducted into the campus accordingly. (S1: 8; 16), (P1: 4; 38-47). This process ensured that the students knew how to navigate around the campus. They were also introduced to campus personnel so that they knew to whom to go for assistance. At the same time, they were informed of what could happen if they did not keep up with their studies or complied with attendance. This meeting also facilitated initial contact between the parent, school, and campus personnel.

At the same time, the high school counselor helped the students to apply to the AEP when they inquired about the alternative program. She advised them to go to the AEP and get an application and apply (S1: 3; 8-9). In turn, the AEP counselor also devoted some of her time making sure that students kept up with their ―Lack Sheets‖ that helped them keep track of the credits that they had earned and the courses that they still needed to pass (S2: 19; 11-13), (P1: 4; 7-12). The principal stated that the AEP counselor kept the students on task and was very caring about them by being a good listener and being their friend, too. In the end, he stated, student success was what was important (P1: 17; 10-14). This practice of keeping up with their ―lack

sheets‖ ensured that students knew exactly what they needed to do to graduate. This was their roadmap to completing their work that would

The PEIMS clerk was responsible for the keeping the students coded correctly so that the campus could get proper credit for special programs and their appropriate funding. She was known to be accurate and the principal stated he did not have to lose sleep at night over miscoded students (P1: 17; 18-21).

The school secretary wore many hats and she also telephoned the students at home when they do not show up for class. This was just one of her many varied duties inclusive of filing on students for truancy (S1: 18; 44). The secretary was described by the principal as relating very well to the students and at times her job required her to be a mom, the nurse, or the disciplinarian, yet she was very caring with the students (P1: 4: 38-47).

The principal had made it his job to know every student by name and to know where they lived in case they did not show up for class or a state examination. At times, he would have to make home visit to pick students up (P1: 3; 29-34), (P1: 12; 6-10). The principal not only made personal home visits, but he also held parent and student conferences to address behavior or lack of attendance to put everyone on notice that he knew that particular student was not complying with the attendance policies (P1: 3; 6-11). He was seen as the school leader by both the teachers and the students. One student shared: ―The school would be failing. He walks around the school checking if everybody is in class, making sure people are here, making sure there are no fights, drugs. He keeps the school safe.‖ (S1: 19; 4-14)

The students saw teachers as being supportive, flexible, and accommodating to their being able to complete their work or assisting them with individualized help as needed. (P1: 7; 5-8) One student said, ―There is more help. Over there (at the high school) it's way more kids than it is here. It's way more kids at the high school…and being that it's way more, like less kids here (at the AEP) then it's easier to get the help that you need. So that's the difference to me.‖ (S5: 4: 23-25)

The teachers at the AEP were required to attend professional training in their areas of expertise in order to keep up with best practices in their field. The prior principal told of how the teachers were required to attend training at the regional service center to stay current in their subject matter, but she added that the practice at the AEP was to hold in-house training where the teachers were asked to work on a certain skill or curricular content and then present to one another at staff or team meetings (P2: 4; 16-18).

The AEP teachers also held different certifications across several disciplines and this enabled them to teach several different subject areas. One teacher even had certification in five different subject areas. The principal stated that he was so proud of his teachers that he was willing to ―put them up against the high school teachers anytime.‖ (P1: 17: 1-6) The principal gave an example of how teachers went above and beyond their normal required duties. One of the teachers was a retired pastor and the principal had had the opportunity to have worked with her for about ten years before he was able to hire her at the AEP. This teacher would stay on her own time to help tutor students in the afternoon beyond the required work day. At the same time, he had also known the new assistant principal for about ten years too before hiring her at

the AEP (P1: 23; 42-49). The principal felt that he was very fortunate to work with a crew of this caliber and that he believed they took their jobs seriously and cared about the students. (P1: 17; 1-6). He felt that the teachers liked to take on a challenge and that this was the spirit that he liked in his staff that made the program fun because they would show their colleagues that helping the students to learn and succeed was something that could be done (P1: 24; 1-2).

The ex-principal was adamant that teacher attitude was a key component for student success. She summed up how she felt about this as follows:

> Teacher attitude is another thing that is very important to me, along with the principal role and the teacher attitude. But there are barriers to school success (that) can be eliminated, make life more meaningful by motivating all students to excel through the teacher (P2: 3; 44-46). So here are some of the characteristics we want from the teacher. And one of the things that I always told our teachers and that I believe in, is that teachers teach from the heart and not from behind the desk. (P2: 4; 1-3)

Sense of Legacy

Administrators, teachers, and staff expressed that they were not merely school employees doing their jobs, but that they had strong convictions about being personally responsible for the future success of the students. They voiced an urgency to make sure that each student succeeded because the condition of being a dropout had far reaching consequences in students‘ futures with regard to careers, families, and society as a whole. They wanted their hard work with the students to have a far-reaching impact, something that would live on beyond their immediate job-related responsibilities.

The principal had a strong conviction that all students mattered because, ―This is the future‖ (P1: 25; 25-29). He believed that being in an alternative education program was not necessarily easier for students, ―It's just that we're taking a different approach to teaching them. And that they all count whether they are in alternative education or the traditional education setting. They are still students that need to be taught‖ (P1: 25; 25-28). The principal gave an example of how his mother ended up in the hospital and one of his ex-students who had become a nurse told his mother, ―He was my principal, my assistant principal at the elementary school and then he was my Social Studies and English teacher at the night school. He got after me sometimes, but I'm where I'm at because of that.‖ (P1: 16; 12-19) The principal stated that his type of feedback felt very good (P1: 16; 12-19). This experience made the principal feel like all of his hard work paid off, not only for the student, but for her family, and society as a whole, to the point that his own mother benefited from his efforts with this particular student.

Empathy

The AEP administrators, teachers, and staff were able to comprehend just what a student was going through because they knew what it is like to be in the same position from a personal standpoint or from the perspective of a close relative that had also dropped out of school or experienced the same issues that the students were experiencing.

The principal modeled forgiveness, acceptance, and understanding when two male students were suspended for fighting. On the day that they were suspended he met with the students and their parents to tell them that he was disappointed in their behavior because they were already ―two grown men trying to beat their brains out‖ (P1: 10; 26-33). He also met with the students and their parents on the day of their return to welcomed them back and the students forgave one another and became ―buddies‖ (P1: 10; 26-33). The principal also noted that he had changed as an administrator when he moved over to the AEP by being less of a disciplinarian. He felt that he was more understanding and that he felt more respected and appreciated by the students (P1: 21; 20-28). He empathized or understood that young people can behave impulsively and make mistakes along the way.

Basically, the principal took a paternal stance and cared about teaching character education to the students, as needed, so that they could make better choices in the future and to demonstrate that they could overcome their mistakes. He would tell the students that they were like his sons and his daughters and that if they were on his campus they were his in absence of their real parents who might or might not be in active in the students' lives (P1: 20; 1-4).

When a student tells him that they are too old to have him call their parents or that he cannot contact their parents because they are living on their own. He tells them:

> I'm disappointed in that behavior and I tell them …this is how I'm going to fix it. And I want to fix it. I say, _I don't want this happening.' I say, _You know, Mrs. . She is like my sister, Mr. , he is like my brother.' I say, _That's the way I do it.' I say, _That's the way I treat you, the way I do because you're like my son while you're here. So you're are on my campus, you're mine. Whether you like it or not.' (P1:19-20; 47-49, 1-4)

The principal also remembered that when he was young, girls that became pregnant were usually sent away from home to live with their relatives to have their babies before returning to the conservative town. This type of treatment was something that he felt the young girls did not deserve. The principal did not even like to think that the babies that the girls were carrying were mistakes. He believed that the students needed to face the issue head on and accept that they were going to be parents and make it right by continuing with their educations. He would speak with the pregnant girls and encourage them by telling them, ―We are going to educate you, we're going to take care of your baby, and we're going to feed you and do everything it takes to keep you in school so that you become productive‖ (1: 21; 1-7).

One teacher shared how she empathized with homeless student:

> Because we have to, as a teacher, as an instructor, I have to come to the realization that this person may not be doing their best, or might not look or feel their best because they are homeless. And like I said, earlier, lack of water or lack of clothing or so forth. So I do have to be sensitive to that. (T7: 22; 11-14).

The ex-principal had been responsible for the inception of the AEP and she was sympathetic to students and how hard it was to get an education. She shared that, ―It took me twelve years to graduate from college. At that time there were not any grants or free money, so I had to work and go to school and work and go to school. In between I had five kids. At age eighteen, I had two children. So I was sensitive and empathetic to the needs of our students, of our teen mothers especially.‖ (P2: 7; 43-46) The ability to be empathetic no doubt increased teacher understanding and compassion for students that may have experienced indifference while attending the local AEP.

Acts of Kindness

The AEP administrators, teachers, and staff were able to take the time to do simple things for the students such as listening, recognizing their efforts, or remembering their birthdays, or helping them out with such things as money, groceries, rides to school or other things that make the students feel that they care about them.

The students liked it when school personnel took the time to treat them with courtesy and respect or when the teachers did simple things like give them snacks (S3: 7; 17) One student stated that the secretary at the AEP treated him like a VIP by taking and delivering messages to him. This is something that he was sure would never have taken place at the high school. (S3: 9; 19-31)

The principal also stated that the students were respected and treated like young adults because many of them already had children or were working. He did not talk down to them and made it a point to really listen to them so that they could explain to him why they had behaved or spoken in a certain way. He would tell them, ―I need to know why you're doing this so that we can work with you‖ (P1: 19; 23-24). He felt that it did not matter if they were nine or nineteen that they needed to know that they counted and that their voice mattered. (P1: 19; 23-27)

Caring

The AEP administrators, teachers, and staff members demonstrated genuine actions that indicated that they cared about the students. More than one teacher stated that they baked cakes

for student birthdays or did some other sort of classroom incentive to encourage them to attend school. Some of the teachers cited time and again that they would even give students rides to school as needed. Teachers would often collectively provide groceries or money to students that were in need. On more than one occasion, teacher participants had tears in their eyes from describing how much they cared about the well-being and success of their students.

The principal voiced the following,

> We have to take care of these kids, they made a mistake and they end up as a Parenting Education Program (PEP) clients, but they are still students. So sometimes some of my colleagues (at the high school), say we (at the AEP) get too involved. I have to be because they're my students. (P1: 17; 38-45)

The principal told of how the girls that were pregnant would be a little shy or embarrassed about coming in, but they would eventually get in the flow of things because the teachers and staff at the AEP wanted the AEP to reflect a caring campus climate. The principal used the term ―humanistic‖ to describe the type of treatment that personnel at the AEP strived to provide for the girls. (P1: 11; 9-22)

Students stated that they were grateful for teachers being flexible about when they handed in their work that was due (S4: 7; 11-14). Even though these types of descriptive contributions were coded as being part of the teacher dedication and work ethic, the systemic structure within the AEP program dictated that the teachers allow students flexible times to hand in work that was due. Yet the students saw or viewed these actions on behalf of the AEP teachers as being caring or understanding because this type of treatment or level of understanding was not something that had been evident at the regular high school.

Leadership

According to the participants, students appreciated the principal at the campus. Students reported the principal as being friendly, approachable, and described him as an individual who took the time to learn their names, greet them, and talk to them. He usually inquired how they were doing in their classes. (S2: 20; 8) He encouraged the students to do well in their classes and to become involved in programs at the AEP. Other times, he would speak to the students about careers or job sites (S3: 9; 37). One student described the principal as being the captain of the school because he took care of everything and making everyone feel like it was their home and because he was seen as someone that took care of everyone. (S3: 19; 8-10) At the same time, one student stated, ―His job is important because he's the one that disciplines some of us doing something wrong.‖ (S4: 20; 26-27). ―It's important to discipline. A lot of people need discipline. And he's not afraid to tell you.‖ (S4: 20; 31-32) She knew how he felt about fighting on the campus.

> We're older already. We don't need to be fighting with people. That's for when you're kids. It's fine then. But you're in a high school, you need to be more mature. There are teen mothers that still try and fight people…and that's not…, you're a mom…teach your kid, you know. And the principal doesn't like for people to fight. He keeps on top of it. (S4: 21; 40-43)

She goes on to add, ―The principal is the best. He's the best principal. I didn't like any of my other principals. I like the principal because he's nice. We have the best principal, we have good teachers. It's a good school.‖ (S4: 25; 29-31)

The principal‘s background as an ex-oil field supervisor influenced his work with the students and his teachers and staff at the AEP. The principal cited how he never used to show up at the work site all dressed up and clean-looking or sat in his truck as was customary for other oil field supervisors to do while surveying the work in progress. He showed up ready to roll up his sleeves and step in and help out as needed. This strong work ethic was something he attributed to his father and he modeled this on the campus. He loved his job and did whatever it took to help out. ―Even though some days are really, really challenging, I still find myself getting up in the morning and wanting to be here, here in this office. But it is the people around me that are really, really good and together we make it through another day.‖ (P1: 15; 1-8)

The principal also saw himself as a resource for his students, staff, and teachers. He maintained that a lot of his job was to remain calm, to be a good listener, to work towards resolving problems, and to be an example for the students. He did not like being absent from the campus and had not taken any sick days the prior year and had even missed workshops to remain on the campus. (P1: 15; 22-34) The principal also prided himself on making the effort to remember the students‘ names and at times even had pet names for some of his students. (P1: 17; 38-45)

Work Ethic

The administrators, teachers, and staff perform their duties for the benefit of the students. Basically, they viewed their daily mission of doing everything that they can to make sure that the students succeed in graduating from the program.

The principal had a strong work ethic that he hoped he was modeling for the students and the staff. He made himself available to them and prided himself on never being absent from his responsibilities at the campus. (P1: 15; 22-34)

The school secretary had been with the program since its inception in 1990. She had helped build up the program from the ground up. (SDY: 1: 39-23) She shared a comprehensive synopsis of what a hectic morning entails for her at the AEP:

> A typical day. Okay. Gosh, I need,...I come in and I start looking on my computer to see who's going to be out. You know I have access to the ASOP program, and I am able to see what teachers are going to be out, there are times the teachers are always, they're late and I have to close their room up and issue things out of this office. Do attendance out of the office. Do you know, give out their breakfast and things like that. From there on I start taking phone calls on the students that are going to be absent. And I log those absences down. Constantly, answering the telephone. And then there are the parents of students and students that are coming in. I used to have to do enrollment and registration and everything. So they've cut that down, and given it to someone else on the teams for a while. And you know we've grown so much. We started out with 30 students in 1991, and ….now we are always over 100. (SDY: 3; 37-45 & 4; 1-7).

The fact that the secretary had been instrumental in helping to set up the AEP and that she managed these daunting duties, amongst so many others, each day was indicative of her dedication to the program over the past 14 years. Clearly, she was the principal's right hand in his absence and without her guidance the AEP could not serve the needs of the students.

One of the teachers gave a very specific example of how her work ethic impacted student learning:

> My role is important because I take my job seriously. I like what I'm doing. Giving the best knowledge that I possibly can, I teach them everything that I basically know for a beginner. I really feel that I just do wonders for…I don't feel threatened. I feel like I want them to know how to really align a memorandum, how to be able to save in a floppy, how to make charts and graphs, how to draw pictures. I don't say, I don't want them to learn this. I know there was one student that was trying to figure out how to work with the Excel, to put in the series, like July, August, and September, that's part of the series. Instead, I say, _O.k. Let me teach you.' So it's basically, you want this, I could tell she was a (the) type of perfectionist student that she wanted to see her chart. Well, I would accept just the numbers. I said, _Let me show you how that is done.' She said, _Oh, Wow!'(T7: 23; 39-46 & 24; 1-3).

The final data aggregations under Theme 1- Hiring the Right Personnel are notated in Table 1.

Table 1		**THEME 1: HIRING THE RIGHT PERSONNEL**					
	Teacher	**Sense**	**Empathy**	**Acts of**	**Caring**	**Principal**	**Work**
	& Staff	**of**		**Kindness**		**Leadership**	**Ethic**
	Training	**Legacy**					
Administrators	13	14	13	1	0	5	6
& Staff	19	12	9	2	1	3	5
	28	5	4	3	0	1	6
Total: Adm./Staff	**60**	**31**	**26**	**6**	**1**	**9**	**17**
Teachers	13	5	4	6	0	0	1
	7	8	1	3	0	0	1
	5	10	2	0	0	0	1
	18	7	0	0	0	0	1
	23	4	0	4	0	0	3
	13	19	6	0	1	0	2
	8	1	4	3	1	0	2
Total: Teachers	**87**	**54**	**17**	**16**	**2**	**0**	**11**
Totals: Adm./Staff							
& Teachers	**147**	**85**	**43**	**22**	**3**	**9**	**39**
Students	13	0	0	0	0	1	0
	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
	10	3	1	9	0	2	0
	12	0	0	5	0	4	0
	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Total: Students	**35**	**4**	**1**	**17**	**0**	**8**	**0**
Totals = 413	**182**	**89**	**44**	**39**	**3**	**17**	**39**
Percents = 100.0%	**44.00%**	**22.00%**	**11.00%**	**9.00%**	**1.00%**	**4.00%**	**9.00%**

Monitoring Academic Progress

This theme refers to the systemic and purposeful process within the AEP of knowing just exactly where the students are with regards to earning credits towards graduation, work completion, attendance, and progress on skills needed to pass the TAKS state assessments. Academic monitoring consisted of three subthemes: communication process, academic tracking, and flexible scheduling. The practice of academic monitoring most likely provided both the students and the teachers with information about attendance and academic credits. This type of diligent monitoring may have ensured that students were successful in attending class each day, completing their work, and earning credits towards graduation.

Communication Process

This theme refers to the ability to exchange information and to keep open communication between the principal, the teachers, the parents, and the students through personal face-to-face discussions, through phone calls, memos, home visits, meetings, or other methods so that everyone is aware of what is going on within the AEP or on a confidential basis with particular students.

The teaching assistant telephoned the students when they were absent or were late arriving to school. The students were made aware that the school or someone at the school knew when they were absent and that they would take action to call them to come in or call them to the home in the mornings to wake them up (S1: 7; 38-44).

Clear expectations were communicated to the students when they interviewed with the principal with regard to regular attendance, doing their work, and behaving. The students knew that if they did not do well at the AEP that there were other students that were ready to take the place of any student that was dismissed or sent back to the high school (S1: 19; 16-36). ―The principal told us, you know, if we miss school we can get kicked out and they have a student from the high school waiting to fill up, you know, the places of the students as they get kicked out. I don't want to be kicked out of here. I just can't (S4: 21; 29-31).

The rules of attending the AEP were known to the students and the parents because when they interviewed with the principal they signed a contract that was kept on file that stated the student pledged to follow the rules with regard to behavior, academics and attendance (P1: 10; 38- 44), (P2: 3; 32-33). The students clearly knew that they had a schedule to follow each day and that it was not up to them to decide whether to go to class or not. If they were missing from class and it was known that they were on the campus, the principal would seek out the student and make sure that they understood they had to be in class (P1: 11; 1-4).

The teachers would also communicate with the principal on a daily basis about the many times they had called a student or parent at home without being successful at reaching them. The principal would make home visits as needed going to several students' homes to make face to face contact to find out why a student was not attending the AEP (P1: 3; 29-34), (P1; 12; 6-10). The principal was a big believer in parental contact and would call home or hold parent conferences even if the students felt that they were already too big or too old to have someone at school call home. Many times, the principal acted as a family counselor during these meetings to

try and repair parent and student relationships. He felt that at times he could be very ―possessive‖ of the students and would remind both parents and students that he was the parent in charge of the students while they were attending the AEP (P1: 5; 21-37).

The principal also gave concrete examples of how the AEP teachers met the needs of the AEP students by conducting tutorials from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and then turned right around to teach night school from 4:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. for students from the regular high school. He cited how the first year that he had been on the campus the teachers had volunteered to teach without any compensation because they really cared about meeting the needs of all the students that needed to graduate. Their actions had impressed upon him that he had a very dedicated faculty. (P1: 6; 33-47)

Counseling support was also available to the students at both the local high school and at the AEP. Students received information about the program and how to apply for the program once they inquired about what they had to do to transfer to the AEP (S2: 2; 13-14, 27-24). There was open communication between the schools when a student wished to make the transition from the high school campus to the AEP.

Student Academic Accountability

This theme refers to the processes that school personnel follow or practice to actively monitor student academic progress. This was done by usually holding meetings to discuss how individual students were doing. These meeting consisted of the counselor, the principal, and the teachers.

These meeting usually involved discussions about a student‘s grades, attendance, attitude, and how they were doing socially.

The students had academic support and guidance to help them complete their studies and they were held accountable through regular visits with the AEP counselor who would advise them utilizing their ―Lack Sheet‖ or list of courses that they still needed to take in order to graduate. (S1:7; 2-25), (S3: 3; 25)

The ex-principal elaborated on how student attendance was tracked using the ―What I Lack sheets‖ when she was principal. She believed that student attendance impacted their learning, the campus Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and of course, campus accountability ratings. She shared a sample of the tracking card and explained how it was used:

> And all of our students had a tracking card, like a punch in card, in and out and so forth. The teachers would look at it on Friday and see. Oh, there are gaps here. Where was this student or how many times was he absent or [sic] so forth? And the back of the card, it had positive behavior and non-appropriate behavior and students would get points. Now, when they got a certain number of points, accumulation of points, they would get prizes or gifts or rewards. Sometimes it could be a bowling trip with a hamburger and a coke and they just loved that (P2: 2; 6-12).

The new campus principal shared that the students were held accountable for attending school on a regular basis and when they failed to do so a truancy court case was filed against them (S1: 10; 1-28). A new district attorney had been elected and he was serious about students being in class, so he was working with the school and the district-wide attendance committee to get students in school or have them remanded into court-ordered tutorials if necessary (P1: 8; 35-45), (P1: 7; 46). The students were also used to the secretary calling to their homes when they were absent

(S1: 18; 44). Students were also fully aware that attendance was of concern to the district and that student's absences were monitored (S2: 20; 11-14). The secretary would run a list of the students that were absent on a daily basis and both she and the principal would start making phone calls (P1: 18; 46-48). The principal was also known to go out and pound on doors if students did not show up for school. Many times, students were living with other students, but as long as he had an address, he would ―hound them‖ (P1: 3; 16-17), (P1: 12; 6-10). The communication to students was strong: if you are absent, you are missing out on instruction.

Flexible Scheduling

Promoting student success was achieved by structuring the day so that it facilitated the delivery of the curriculum. Flexible scheduling also provided students with various opportunities and different times to adapt their activities throughout the day.

Students were able to attend and concentrate on their classes by knowing that they did not have to worry about making their breakfasts, stopping to buy a breakfast, or worry about child care for their children. Parenting students took advantage of how the alternative program classes and day were structured at the AEP. These students started out their day by dropping off their children at the daycare center and then arriving at their Focus Class in time to partake of daily breakfast tacos that were ordered for them each morning. This incentive was appreciated because the students did not have to prepare breakfast at home or incur the added expense of buying something on the way to school (S1: 5; 2-36).

Flexible class schedules allowed for content based instruction in the four basic content areas of Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies to be available during the morning hours while tutorial assistance provided one-to-one assistance for students during the afternoon session. The flexible class schedule also meant that students could work in a part-time job into their day, too. The students indicated that the Open Door Session started at 12:30 p.m. and that it was something that they took advantage of in order to get the individual assistance that they needed from the teachers to do their work (S1: 6; 11-34).

The pacing at the AEP was something else that was appreciated. One student responded that the teachers had helped to meet her needs by facilitating flexible work completion times. This allowed the student to pace her studies:

> They‘re not strict about it. They don‘t tell you do it, do it now, you know. They help you and they say take your time. Whatever you‘ve done, turn it in, we‘ll look over it together, and then whatever you did wrong, we‘ll go over it and you can fix it. At the high school they wouldn‘t do that, you got it wrong, you got it wrong (S4: 7; 11-14). You ask for help at the high school, most of the time they couldn‘t help you one-one-one. They had to help everybody at the same time. And I need somebody to like sit there and explain it to me so that I can see it and know what to do. And here they do that for you.‖ (S4: 6; 44-46)

The students could work hard and finish a course in two weeks or take their time. (S1: 9; 38-40) (S2:4; 1-5) The principal also stated that there was a misconception in the district that just because the students ended up at the AEP that the coursework was going to be much easier. He stated that all the courses at the AEP were the same ones that were being required of the students at the regular high school. He was adamant that the reason he had hired the teachers he had since arriving at the AEP is because ―they are not going to water down anything‖ (P1: 6: 33-47).

Homework was optional for students. They did not get any homework assignments, but they could request that their teachers give them additional work to take home. Students could also continue with class assignments at home if they wished and then return them to the teacher when completed. (S1:12: 6-9) If there were instances where the students did not want to do their work the principal would give them gentle paternal reminders that they could always go back to ―being the high school principal‘s son or daughter again.‖ (P1: 20; 27-33)

The curriculum at the AEP was seen to be quite rigorous by the students, teachers, and administrators. The principal stated that much of the curriculum that the teachers taught was just as rigorous or surpassed what was being taught at the high school. He was very proud of his teachers. Even though the classes were not classified as being Advanced Placement (AP) courses, the science teacher did not water down his expectations for the students. His tests were so challenging that regular high school students attending the night courses needed reviews before taking his exams. The state TAKS science results indicated that the curriculum being taught was effective in helping the students to pass. (P1:13; 14-23) The scheduling at the AEP allowed for students to attend open-door tutorials with their teachers after 12:30 each day. These tutorials helped the students deal with the challenging curriculum so that they could be successful.

The former principal stated that the same old format that was followed at the traditional high school could not be followed at the AEP because this had already proven not to have worked. ―So we don‘t want to set up our students for failure, we‘ve got to totally change and that‘s where the computer system instruction and modified curriculum, the flexible hours all these different

things that go with alternative schools fit in.‖ (P2: 7; 12-27) Under the old principal, the site-based decision-making committee set up five components for student success. These components included the curriculum, assessments, organizational structures, student support, and staff development. (P2: 4; 5-12) She believed that ―if a student does not learn the way we teach them, then we must teach the way they learn (P2: 4; 22-27) Later, the new principal and his site-based decision-making committee had set three goals in the campus improvement plan (CIP) that were also conducive to furthering student success with the curriculum. These three goals were to improve student attendance, offer tutorials to support the students, and make sure that everyone kept up with students‘ graduation plans through monitoring of the lack sheets to ensure that students were making progress towards graduation. (P1: 14; 1-2) The final data aggregations under Theme 2- Academic Monitoring are notated in Table 2.

Table 2	THEME 2: MONITORING ACADEMIC PROGRESS		
	Communication	Student	Flexible
	Process	Academic Acct.	Scheduling
Administrators	19	22	14
& Staff	5	12	20
	14	4	3
Totals: Adm./Staff	**38**	**38**	**37**
Teachers	15	10	0
	17	11	9
	26	14	19
	17	10	2
	13	6	22
	10	19	1
	18	10	5
Totals: Teachers	**116**	**80**	**58**
Totals: Adm./Staff/ Teachers	**154**	**118**	**95**
Students	25	15	19
	17	1	8
	15	12	3
	25	10	16
	6	10	8
Totals: Students	**88**	**48**	**54**
Totals: Adm./Staff/Teachers			
and Students	**242**	**166**	**149**
Totals Codes 2, 3, & 8 = 557			
Percents = 100%	**43.00%**	**30.00%**	**27.00%**

Providing Student Support Services

According to the participants, the alternative program provided students with the proper support services. These related to programs, structures, or services to address the specific needs of

students who dropout and return to school. Four subthemes were aggregated under the practice of providing students with support services: community support, parental and peer support, special programs or services, and transitional support. The practice of providing support services at the AEP or through the home more than likely enabled students to continue working towards receiving their diplomas, working while attending the AEP, or motivating them to complete their studies and move on to future careers or higher education.

Community Support

Support from the community at large was given to the AEP in the form of outside speakers, monetary donations, invitations to participate in community activities, or even state and federally funded programs that provided the students the opportunity to keep attending school and at times, to even involve themselves in local civic affairs. .

The students that were parents were thankful for the daycare center, Homebound Services, Medicaid, Parenting Education Program (PEP) services, and transportation to and from the AEP (S1: 23; 1-20). A female student stated, ―It is important because you get like daycare, Homebound school and after you have the baby…because they need it, they need the help. My baby gets Medicaid and the childcare.‖ (S1: 23; 1-20)

The students reported that they also benefited from their own campus community. The former principal shared that the organizational structure of the AEP had been fashioned so that parents, teachers, students, staff, and administrators would be able to work together in an atmosphere of trust and commitment with the common goal of being able to have fun while working together at

the same time. (P2: 4; 5-12) She shared how she felt about having served as the AEP's first principal:

> We saved a lot of lives. Students would have not graduated from high school if it hadn't been for this school. We gained a lot of respect because when we first started, you know, people weren't sure if they would accept it. And what is it? Is it bad kids?... and all kinds of questions. And we showed them we gained the respect of the community. We serve the community a lot. We got involved with projects. (P2: 9; 19-23)

The students did have opportunities to become engaged in special events available in their school community such as decorating the school Christmas tree or participating in food preparation for the annual tea held for the parents and other members of the community at large (S3: 19; 29-45).

Some students had access to mentors from a nearby military base. The personnel there visited the AEP and helped to counsel students about possible careers in the air force and to also helped them on a one-to-one basis with their school work (S3: 11; 17-23).

The community was also very active in supporting the AEP through donations that allowed the students to participate in activities related to Halloween, the Annual Christmas Tea, or the 4-H County Fair. In addition, these activities were open to the public and the students participated by helping the children in the daycare to be in a Halloween parade that took place at the campus, or by preparing the food for the Christmas tea in the homemaking classes, and the prior year one of the students had raised the Grand Champion steer for the county fair. Extended family members such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and immediate family members, and spouses and children of the students also participated. School board members had a reputation for taking an interest with the students and the activities that took place within the AEP. The local paper also covered these

events and students were also allowed to participate in the Homecoming prom (P1: 6; 9-14). Relatives that worked out in the community would in turn get their organizations to help the AEP out with donations as needed for the up and coming events (P1: 18; 26).

The former principal shared how the culture at the AEP was to celebrate student achievement and success. Student birthdays, student of the month, student of the week, and graduations were regular celebrations that took place at the AEP (P2: 3; 23-28).

Parental and Peer Support

According to the participants, students also benefited from the encouraging support that they received from their families and peers to finish their studies. Parents assisted their children by encouraging them to apply, enroll, and attend the AEP (S2:8; 4-30). The students had parental support while attending the AEP in the form of child care, words of encouragement, transportation, and housing (S1:12; 24-25) (S1: 8; 36-37) (S1: 9; 16-20) (S1:14; 7-9) (S2: 20; 14-19) (S3: 4; 25-27). Parents also provided their children with rewards such as burgers, clothes, or mini outings such as fishing to compensate their students for doing well in their studies at the AEP (S3: 5: 6-9) (S3: 15; 12-14). One student came right out and stated that parental support was important to him because, ―I need their love.‖ (S3: 19; 14). Another student stated that her parents were important to her because, ―They‘re always there for you. When you‘re upset or when you‘re sad, you can always go to them and talk to them and they‘re there to help you and explain things to you (S4: 20; 36-41).

Students also supported one another with information that they shared about the AEP program, about careers, and about programs available at the local university or two-year college (S3: 2;

27-39). One student had encouraged his friend not to drop out of the high school and to enroll at the AEP, instead. The other student and his girlfriend were expecting a baby. This particular student did follow his friend's advice and was successfully attending the AEP and earning credits towards graduation (S3: 24; 21-25). One student understood that she had a great role in telling other students about the AEP. ―I get to tell other students that need help, you know, that go to the high school, I get to tell them about his school and tell them how it is…and how it helps people (students) to catch up. I get to spread the good word.‖ (S4: 24; 15-17) The student gives an example of how one of her friends that was two years behind at the regular high school was due to graduate the following May. ―When she was at the high school she never knew about the AEP. So, after she found out she came here and it's helped her. She's caught up, so now she's doing her work, she comes after school. So the AEP motivates her.‖ (S4: 24; 8-10) Another student that was interviewed also learned about the AEP from another student. ―I had a friend who came here. She was telling me, like…that I wasn't…it's not all about being easy. It's just like the more help…so I figured that I could get more help. That's why I came here. She told me about it (S5: 2; 2-4).

Siblings also encouraged one another to finish school. One student had a twin brother that had already graduated from the AEP. This twin told the principal that he was doing everything he could to get his brother into the same two-year college that he was already attending. ―I don't want him to have to work, I want him to keep going to school. If he needs money and I'm able too, I'll give him a little bit of spending money.‖ (P1: 22; 25-30) The twin brother had received

special education services, while the one that was attending the AEP had a pending ARD to determine if he would also qualify for the program. (P1: 22; 25-30) (P1: 22; 6-11)

The students also made lists of one another's phone numbers and called one another to wake up or went over to each other's houses to see why they were not coming to school. One student started calling his friends when he became concerned that if not enough students attended, the AEP might be shut down if too many students were being sent back to the high school for failure to attend, behave, or complete their work at the AEP. (S3: 20; 37-42)

The principal related that parents that had made an effort to enroll their students at the AEP, also made the effort to see that these students attended because they did not want their children to be dropouts. He did; however, admit that some parents were not very supportive, but that for the most part they wanted what was best for their children. He stated:

> They get those kids here. They don't want them to be drop outs or throw away kids. Some parents are very…or not,…but those that are involved, they want what's best for their kids. And sometimes being an alternative student, they've already had problems, discipline problems, or attendance problems, but the parent's still trying to get them here. (P1: 18; 1-4)

Special Programs Support

School-wide programmatic services or other special programs available for students supported them to continue their studies and graduate from the AEP.

Students were also aware that the services that were being provided for them or other students at the AEP were meant to help them and they were grateful for these services The availability of a day care center allowed them to graduate and move on to the outside world (S2: 14; 35-37). One

student stated, ―Day care is real good with the kids. They‘re always on the kids, watching them for other students so they can graduate and move on already. Just things like that (S2: 14; 35-37).‖ This same student also claimed to have better attendance ―Yes, so she (the home economics teacher) comes and gets me. Well, the van does. I thank her. As a matter of fact, we gave her an award because she‘s so helpful and things…encouraging.‖(S3: 12; 19-21) (S3: 11; 42-46) (S3: 12; 1-25) (S3: 14; 25)

Students were also in need of special programs being made available for them such as special education (S3: 8; 14-16). At the time of the study, only two special education students remained on the campus. (P1: 12; 35-39) They had been grandfathered into the alternative program even though the alternative education program did not provide special education services. The students, however; were already receiving small group instruction, self-paced learning and work completion through additional time, and one-to-one individualized instruction as needed. These are the mainstays of special education, so they were not being denied any services that would normally be offered through special education. Because these services were not being formally offered at the AEP through inclusion or content mastery, a decision had been made not to accept any more special education students from the high school. (P1: 12: 35-39) The principal felt that it was important for these students to feel good about themselves. ―The students usually realize that they could be as successful at the same level as the rest of the students when they received news that they had passed their TAKS test.‖ (P1: 22; 1-7)

This action, not to accept, allow, or enroll anymore special education students to enroll from the high school clearly impacted special education students that wished to transfer to the AEP. A

female student stated that her sister no longer wanted to attend school and did not attend the interview for admission with the principal, but that their father had attended the meeting. ―My dad wants her to go back to school or get her GED, but she doesn‘t get up in the morning. But my dad came to talk, but they don‘t have like the special education classes and stuff. She‘s in content mastery and they don‘t have classes like that here.‖ (S4: 8: 44-45) (S4: 9; 1-2)

One of the students had been a LEP student at the high school and when she indicated that she wanted to transfer to the alternative program she had to formally give notification in writing that she no longer wished to receive bilingual services in order to be accepted into the AEP program. She indicated that she had been receiving bilingual services up till high school.

> Yeah, all the way. But I think my freshmen year, because when I wound up here and why I did get the spot, they made me sign this papers whether I…if I was going to drop the bilingual class or still stay in it. Because if I was going to stay in it, then I wouldn‘t be able to come here. (S2: 15; 9-12)

A female student indicated that she had been tested for the Gifted and Talented program when she had been in Grade 4. (S4: 14; 36-46) She had not qualified for the GT program, but she stated that she knew she was smart, but not that smart. The point was moot because this was one of the special programs that was not provided at the AEP. (S4: 15; 26-27) Nonetheless, two of the teachers indicated that they challenged the gifted and talented students that did on occasion transfer into the AEP because they too had pressing family matters to undertake or had found the high school boring. One teacher confirmed that on occasion a gifted and talented student did enroll at the AEP:

> On rare occasions we'll have a pretty sharp kid. But, uh. Mr._ the science teacher was just showing me…an assimilation he can do in the science lab, but he has had only two kids. (T3: 21; 38-40).

Another teacher told of how GT students were not formally classified within the AEP, but that she would notice a big gap in learning between her regular students versus some of the smart students that would on occasion enroll at the AEP. She said:

> But I do notice that there are some kids that are very sharp, quite intelligent. And as I'm explaining something they sometimes make it, have their own shortcuts to learning. They even teach me. It's amazing how a student can teach a teacher. Whenever they are so smart that they have ways of being, they think fast and they find other shortcuts to learning. And that's when I see them, that they're pretty good and that they finish their work on time. They get good grades. Immediately, I notice the big gap. (T4: 11; 36-43).

The science teacher shared that he had indeed had instances of teaching gifted and talented students:

> Well, oddly enough, yes, but because they were here, they were here for a reason. One girl was extremely sharp…young lady, blond hair and everything. She was suicidal. And so, I had to really handle her with the psychological kid gloves as it were. She had cigarette burn marks all over her arms…and other such things where she had been trying to commit suicide. So there must be a great deal of grief going on in her mind. I encountered a couple of other students that were really ill-suited to this school. But I designed an environmental assistance class for them and I sent one girl on explorations down (to the next adjoining town) to compare the water quality. And what I got back was really pretty nice for a place like this, you know. Because she actually tested the water, did some comparisons, and came to some conclusions.

Transitional Support

As students completed the AEP program they received assistance to transfer from the AEP program to one of the local two or four year colleges, or other vocational program leading to certification. .

Students indicated that their teachers helped them to transition into the world of work by informing them of the job fields or available programs that led to certification in a field. (S1:17; 7-8) Sometimes the students took field trips as part of either the PEP or Career and Technology Programs. ―Sometimes, we'll…we have field trips like we go to the college and …like the two-year colleges in the surroundings towns. And things like that, like to visit the schools in the surroundings communities.‖ (S4: 10; 10-12) However, there were instances where students were concerned because they knew of programs, but had not received any help or information from their AEP teachers or counselors about how to gain entry into these careers. One student wanted to be a pharmacist and already knew that the local college had built a special building for this vocation; however, ―I haven't found out about anything. I need to though. I just…I don't know where to get like the information about it (S4: 19; 13-14). However, students in the Career and Technology program did have opportunities to visit local places of employment as part of participating in this program. (S1:17; 24)

The AEP program also helped the students to transition into college life by providing them with both regular and remedial college course work if needed. Students at the AEP could receive tutorial help even after they graduated from the program. If a student happened to graduate early from the program; for example, during the fall semester and then enrolled at the local college

they could return back to the AEP to receive help from the teachers during tutorials with their college level work during the spring semester. (P1: 23; 1-6) The previous spring before this study was conducted, one of the teachers was tutoring about six students that were still taking advantage of the opportunity to receive tutorial help in the afternoons after 3:45 p.m. (P1: 24; 1-2)

The final data aggregations under Theme 3- Student Support Services are notated in Table 3.

Table 3	THEME 3: STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES			
	Community Support	**Parental & Peer Support**	**Special Programs Support**	**Transitional Support**
Administrators,	7	3	5	2
& Staff	10	0	0	0
	2	0	0	0
Total: Adm./Staff	**19**	**3**	**5**	**2**
Teachers	5	0	0	0
	2	0	0	0
	1	0	0	0
	2	0	0	0
	8	0	0	0
	12	0	0	0
	5	0	0	1
Total: Teachers	**35**	**0**	**0**	**1**
Total: Adm.Staff/Teachers	**54**	**3**	**5**	**3**
Students	4	7	0	5
	1	1	3	10
	9	3	8	4
	2	4	0	6
	0	15	0	5
Totals: Students	**16**	**30**	**11**	**30**
Total: Adm./Staff/				
Teachers & Student	**70**	**33**	**16**	**33**
Combined Totals				
Codes 4, 9G, 9H, 9I = 152				
Percents = 100%	**46.00%**	**21.70%**	**11.00%**	**21.70%**

Maintaining a Safe Campus Climate

The data revealed that the practice of providing a safe learning environment within the confines of the school so that the students could focus on their studies and be successful in attaining their high school degrees was a valued practice. This theme was a surprising element in the findings of this study. It became apparent that a safe school was something that was very important to the students by the number of times that they brought up this subject during their interviews.

Safe School

Participants indicated that the ability of the AEP to provide students with a safe and welcoming place to attend promoted an educational climate or setting that was conducive to the completion of their studies. Attending a safe campus was very important to the students. They cited many instances of fighting and bullying behaviors in which they had become involved while attending the high school. They stated that such instances had never been seen or seldom occurred at the AEP (S1: 10; 27-29) (S1: 11; 1). In addition, students cited almost no cases or infrequent instances of insubordination and harassment. One student felt that teachers should not have to deal with one student's insubordination when there were so many other students who wanted to learn and that one student should not be allowed to take up all of the teacher's time (S2: 1; 30-35). The students did not know of any instances of theft, weapons, or drug use at the alternative campus either. (S1:11; 25-37)

The students felt that disciplinary problems and issues should be dealt with immediately before they escalated into something bigger that could involve other people, weapons, or others getting

hurt (S1: 21; 38-39) (S1: 10: 27-39) (S1: 11; 1). One student stated that it took her sometime to understand that the AEP is a pretty serious place.

> It's a different…, like here… it's not the high school. You have to be mature enough to do things on your own. Like, not start fights with anybody. Like…if you want to do that, there's the high school. (S2; 12; 12-42)

The principal confirmed that there were literally no instances or cases involving harassment, weapons, or theft (P1: 9; 29). Basically the principal stated that, ―even though we follow the same code of conduct, these alternative kids are easier to work with as far as discipline is concerned. I have been very pleased with that.‖ (P1: 2; 43-49), (P1: 3; 1-2) The principal also confirmed that drug use was something that was heard about, but that it did not occur at the AEP. (P1: 9; 35-36)

The principal also made sure that students learned from their mistakes. He had to place a student in the adjoining disciplinary alternative education program for a period of forty-five days for arriving at the campus intoxicated. He was firm with the student by telling him that he would be accepted back once he completed his time at the DAEP, because ―You are going to learn from this mistake. You won't do it again because next time it will be a one hundred twenty day placement.‖ (P1: 20; 19-22) He made sure that students knew that he had the final say on what kind of consequences they would have for their actions, but at the same time he preserved their dignity.

The principal gave one example of how students had come to know and trust him because he had also worked on getting to know them as individuals. A student came into his office and placed an open pack of cigarettes on his desk. The student admitted that he had smoked a cigarette on

the way to school, but that he was handing the cigarettes in to the principal because he knew they would be found on him sooner or later. This act on behalf of the student ―blew‖ the principal‘s mind to fully realize that students felt that they could openly communicate with him before there was any trouble or disciplinary consequences to deal with. The principal stated that he had more interaction with the students and the teachers at the AEP and that he was able to be more supportive. ―It‘s a different atmosphere. I can talk to these students and know these students, and they know that they can come in here and see me. It‘s one of those things where you‘re not going to take a number.‖ (P1: 25; 1-13)

The final data aggregations under Theme 4- Maintaining a Safe Campus Climate are notated in Table 4.

TABLE 4 THEME 4: Maintaining a Safe Campus Climate	
	Safe Schools
Administrators & Staff	7
	1
	5
Total: Adm./Staff	**13**
Teachers	9
	4
	8
	1
	2
	3
	5
Total: Teachers	**32**
Total: Adm./Staff & Teachers	**45**
Students	26
	3
	5
	18
	7
Total: Students	**59**
Total: Adm./Staff/	
Teachers & Students	**104**
Combined Total	
Code 9A = 104	
Percent = 100%	**100.00%**

Need to Promote A Positive Image of the AEP

This additional theme demonstrated that the practice of supporting the mission of the AEP through positive public support and promotions espousing the value of the AEP for dropouts

within the community or within the district was not in place. The two subthemes that were combined were indicative of a need for a positive school image and promotion of the value of the AEP. The campus personnel and teachers strongly believed in the value of the program and it was probably this belief in the AEP that probably sustained both the students to keep attending and the teachers in their daily missions to instruct the students to ensure their success (Yates, 2005).

Promote a Positive School Image

Participants voiced an urgent need to make an effort to convey a positive image to the community about the purpose of the AEP. Both the students and the teachers were concerned about the image that the community harbored about the alternative education program. When asked what they thought the community thought about the alternative education program, one student replied, ―Negative, because they have never been here. Stuff like that. They say, ―AEP? What are you there for? Why are you incarcerated?‖ (S2: 9; 9-16) One female student stated that people asked her a lot whether or not she had children. She would respond, ―No, we don't have kids, we just came here to the AEP to get help. It helps us. But a lot of people think it's for like moms and dads and pregnant girls. It is for them also, but they let people (students) from the high school that are falling (failing) behind, you know, come here, too.‖ (S4: 9: 38-41)

The principal reported that another student was upset because her high school friends had told her that if she had attended and graduated from the AEP that she was not going to do well on her college entrance test and that they were certain she would have to take remedial courses once she enrolled at one of the local colleges. (P1: 23; 1-2) This made the student upset to think that her

friends thought the work that she had done at the AEP was sub-standard when compared to the work at the high school. The student proved her friends wrong by doing well on her college entrance exams and enrolling in all regular college level course work instead of remedial courses. (P1: 22; 25-45) The student then told the principal that she was offering to help her friends that graduated from the high school with their remedial reading or math course. (P1: 23; 10-24)

The principal also told of how one of his teachers attended a district-wide curriculum level and had one of the high school teachers make the statement that they did not like for students to transfer into the AEP because the coursework was too easy. This so upset the teacher that she reported this to the principal. He then told the teacher to challenge the other high school teacher to a competition the next time that she encountered her at another meeting. The principal admitted that in the beginning or inception of the program that this was a sigma or misconception that was prevalent with high school teachers about the AEP. (P1: 23; 10-15)

Promote the Value of the AEP

Participants indicated that the AEP had great value in their lives and that it was also of value to the community and to society as a whole. One student realized that she had matured while attending the AEP. ―Like I really do think this school did change my life. That it really did make me grow up. Like I grew up on that …from what I was back then… I don‘t act like a kid anymore…I‘m just… I‘m into my job and into going to school and just finishing up (S2: 16; 25-27).‖ This same student reported that the AEP offered an alternative to students who would

otherwise drop out and that it was a viable option for students who were failing in the conventional high school (S1: 4; 28).

Others reported that students' self-esteem was restored because they saw themselves as being successful. One student was so proud of being enrolled at the AEP that he stated he felt, ―Like I'm a big role model…and they look up to that and that's what they want to be… somebody that's going to be somebody…and that_s what they like…and that's what I'm doing right now…is being a leader and succeeding in life…succeeding in life. Just getting up there for my kind.‖ (S3: 24; 5-8)

One student reported that the AEP was meeting his needs that had not been addressed in the high school. The AEP provided him with the one-to-one academic help and the opportunity for him to work at his own pace. These were the two modifications that he needed and that had only been available for special education students at the high school. (S3: 2; 22-25)

The AEP also served as a stepping stone for students that would have otherwise eventually dropped out entirely from the high school. The students transferred to the AEP where they benefited from smaller classes, self-paced work, one-to-one help, and experienced a safe campus where they had rapport, not only with the principal, but with their teachers. The students at the alternative program saw themselves as being successful and made plans to continue with their educations or seek vocational training after graduation from the AEP (S3: 17; 5-9, 25, 35-37, 42-45) (S3: 16; 22, 23, 26, 43). A student stated that he would most definitely have dropped out of the high school because he was ―just as dumb as a goat (S3: 22; 36-46).‖ He saw the AEP as

being instrumental for himself and other students so that they could get an education and graduate (S3: 26; 36-38) (S4: 17; 34-36).

The principal asserted that the value of the AEP was that the ―curriculum was not watered down‖ so that students had to learn the same TAKS and TASP standards as the students at the high school. At the same time, stated that the ―not everybody learns in the same way. We're learning the same things here and teaching the same things, but in different ways to show that the students can be successful. We can extend the students here beyond the traditional school atmosphere‖ (P1: 24; 37-43). The former principal whom had already retired stated that the mission statement of the AEP said it all, ―The AEP will provide students with a different approach to learning, enable them to stay in school or return to school to obtain a high school diploma‖ (P2: 1; 24-41).

The former principal strongly expressed that the school board did not make the best decision when they opted to place the DAEP on the same campus as the AEP. She felt that the focus of the AEP was going to suffer ―because it is not the right thing, it's not in the best interests of the students, the teachers …the whole thing‖ (P2: 9; 1-6). In addition, she was upset that the AEP had once had a full-time counselor, but that now that the DAEP had been situated on the same campus the new counselor had the assigned duties to support the students at the DAEP, too. She had strong convictions that this was a big, big mistake (P2: 3; 32-42). In her opinion, the school board needed to make prudent decisions with regard to the AEP and to keep in mind that the purpose of the AEP was to graduate students, to find the dropouts and to bring them back to school to graduate (P2: 9; 8-14). She went on to say that an academic alternative school and a disciplinary alternative school did not belong together and that she considered this to be a big

injustice to the students, the teachers and the administrators because it was like having to deal with apples and oranges due to the fact that these school had very different characteristics. (P2: 11; 38-44) It was obvious that the former principal viewed the actions of the board as being unsupportive of the mission and value of the AEP,

This former campus administrator also believed that the State of Texas and the nation only had to look at the drop-out data and teen pregnancy rates to understand that alternative education schools were needed in every town and especially in districts with high dropout rates. She felt that alternative schools were the only way for students that had already dropped out to experience success on a one-to-one instructional basis as compared to what the traditional high school had to offer (P2: 10; 32-37).

The final data aggregations under Theme 5 – Need to Promote a Positive Public Image of the AEP are notated in Table 5.

Table 5	THEME 5: Need to Promote A Positive Public Image of the AEP	
	Promote a	Promote the value
	Positive school	Of the AEP
	Image	
Administrators	1	5
& Staff	2	11
	0	4
Total: Adm./Staff	**3**	**20**
Teachers	0	3
	0	1
	0	3
	0	1
	0	0
	0	3
	0	0
Total: Teachers	**0**	**11**
Total: Adm./Staff	**3**	**31**
& Teachers		
Students	2	5
	1	1
	0	4
	4	0
	0	1
Total: Students	**7**	**11**
Total: Adm./Staff/		
Teachers & Students	**10**	**42**
Combined Total		
Codes 9B & 9C = 52		
Percents = 100%	**19.00%**	**81.00%**

Summary: Effective Practices

The four major practices or strategies within the AEP that were conducive to student success involved the following: hiring the right personnel, monitoring academic progress, providing student support services, and maintaining a safe campus climate. One additional theme indicated a need to promote a positive public image of the AEP.

Conclusion

Chapter IV provided a synopsis of some the emergent themes that seemed apparent from the responses given on the *Initial Prior On-site Questionnaire*. While the quotations that were extracted from this initial questionnaire lent insight into the frame of thinking that campus staff members had with regard to their positions and purpose within the alternative education program, the interpretive findings for each of the three research questions to this study were also presented. Chapter V will address the summary of findings and conclusions for each of the three research questions and recommendations for further research.

Chapter V

Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter V restates the purpose of the study, the research questions, presents a brief summary of the research process, a summary of the findings by research questions with connections to the prevailing literature, and posits conclusions for educational practitioners along with recommendations for further study.

The purpose of the study was to determine the characteristics of students that have already dropped out of a Texas public school, but who have chosen to return to an alternative education program to complete their high school studies. In addition, this study attempted to determine the reasons that returning students had for making a decision to return back to school. Finally this study sought to identify and describe effective practices or characteristics that may exist in an effective alternative education program. The questions addressed by this study are as follows:

1. What are the characteristics of the Grade 9-12 students who have dropped out and later returned to school to complete their studies in a selected alternative education program?
2. What are the reasons that returning students give for making a decision to enroll in a selected alternative education program?
3. What do the students and stakeholders in a selected Texas registered alternative education program perceive as effective practices of the program that encourage students to return and complete their educations?

This study utilized qualitative case study methodology integrating taped interviews, written document analysis, and observations. The participants were selected using both comprehensive sampling (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) of the AEP personnel and through random sampling of the students. The following data sources were used: on-site interviews, the researcher's scripted notes, classroom observations, and from both campus and district documents that were provided to the researcher. Finally, strict adherence to ethical research practices guaranteed total anonymity to the study participants by taking considerable care in not revealing the Regional Service Center, the district, the campus, the students, or parents that participated in the study.

Summary of Findings

The following is a summarized account of findings according to the research questions.

Student Characteristics

Students in the selected AEP tended to share some of the same characteristics: economically disadvantaged, teen parents, academically challenged, responsible to their immediate families, self-supporting, subject to disciplinary actions, challenged by state assessments, familiar with consequences of dropping out, self-motivated, and at times, confronted by multiple setbacks. These student characteristics were previously supported in Chapter IV through use of document reviews and excerpts from the interviews.

Several of these characteristics appear to be congruent with previous research; for instance, previous researchers reported that students who were economically disadvantaged tended to drop out more often than other students (Ramsey, 1988; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Natriello, Pallas, & McDill, 1986; Grossnickle, 1986; Martin, 1981; Fine, 1986; Eskstrom,

Goertz, Pollack, & Rock; 1986). The study also found that teen parents struggle to graduate. The findings of this study supported other findings in the literature that indicated that becoming pregnant, becoming a parent, and having to get a job to support and care for a family are factors in students dropping out (Paglin & Fager, 1997; Krashen, 1998; Inman, 2006).

Students in this study consistently, cited that their academic studies had been challenging at the high school and at the AEP. For some of the students in this study, learning disabilities placed them in the at-risk category because they were not expected to graduate within 4 years (Moger, 2010). Additionally, students that were teen parents, LEP, or had failed the state TAKS assessments are also considered to be at-risk in the state of Texas according to the PEIMS system of categorizing students. Students attending this AEP program had to meet the at-risk criteria in order to be considered eligible to attend this AEP. Subsequently, the campus improvement plan (7.1.48) specifically cited six of the at-risk criteria in the Texas Education Code (Section 29.081) that students had to meet in order to attend the AEP (Compensatory Instruction; Appendix C).

Some of the students in this study were being responsible by trying to help their immediate families out in an economic way. The findings of this study supported other findings in the literature that show that students that faced the responsibility to help their immediate families also tended to drop out of school (Coley, 1995; Ingels, 1988; U.S. Department of education, 1988), (Inman, 2006). Other students in this study, did not support their immediate families, but were already self-supporting and out on their own. This finding supported the prevailing literature that students that work eventually have difficulty keeping up with school and a job simultaneously (Coley, 1995; Ingels, 1988; U.S. Department of education, 1988; Inman, 2006).

Some of the students in this study made it clear that they had been subject to disciplinary actions that kept them from attending on a regular basis due to numerous suspensions. In turn, they fell academically behind on their studies and were failing their courses while attending the regular high school. Students with disciplinary problems tend to drop out of school and not complete their studies (U.S. Department of Education, 1996; Ramsey, 1988; Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982; Hemzik, 2006).

The study revealed that almost all of the students in the AEP, including those interviewed for the study, were challenged by state assessments. The students had either failed the Reading, Math, Science, or Social Studies state TAAS or TAKS assessments at least once. This characteristic may not be unique to the students at this study site, but may also be endemic to other alternative programs in other states that also have exit level examinations at the secondary levels (Lavan, 2009).

The students at this study site knew about the consequences of dropping out and they cared about not suffering the consequences of becoming a permanent dropout. The identification of this characteristic was a finding contribution of this study. Some of these students had already been out of school for some time, or had siblings or parents that had also dropped out. They wanted to have careers and to be able to support their families and students were aware that these two factors were going to be hard to accomplish if they became a dropout.

Students in this study were motivated to graduate from the AEP because they saw their peers or siblings being successful after they had attended the AEP and completed their studies. These peers and siblings served as role models for the students in the AEP. Further the students

were motivated to finish because they wanted to attend college or some other training leading to certification in a chosen field. This finding negated previous research that found that students did not have a plan for their life beyond the coming evening or weekend (Inman, 2006). This finding also negated research that found that dropouts do not connect the importance of high school to their futures (Bae, 2008).

A final student characteristic that this study found is that at times, students experienced more than one setback simultaneously making it difficult for them to focus on their school work or to attend school on a regular basis (Coley, 1995; Ingels, 1988; U.S. Department of education, 1988).

Rationale for Returning to School

There were varying reasons that the students gave for returning to the AEP to conclude their high school studies and their rationale may be grouped into three areas: school, personal, or family related reasons.

School Related Rationale

School related reasons were based on the availability of flexible scheduling, parenting and childcare support, differentiated instruction, small classes, self-paced work, a safe school climate, and a drug free campus. What follows are the school related rationale and the supporting literature. They are as follows:

One of the attractions for students to enroll at the AEP was the flexible scheduling that offered the opportunity for students to take core courses in the morning with open entry tutorial sessions in the afternoon that allowed them to hold part-time jobs (Lotto, 1982). In addition, students were provided with Saturday tutorial sessions throughout the year and provided with both teacher and instructional aide assistance utilizing State Compensatory funding. This finding corroborated other research in the area of flexible scheduling (Keene, 2003; Jones, 2006; Fulton, 2007; Walker, 2004; Schussler; 2002; Cook; 2003)

A positive aspect about enrolling at the AEP was the parenting and childcare support made available to teen parents. The services available to these young parents were individual and group counseling session, and pregnancy related services such as the Homebound, the PEP program, and on-site daycare. Students were also allowed to work on credit recovery for work missed during their pregnancy related absences (Lotto, 1982).

The students took advantage of the differentiated instruction that included re-teaching, one-to-one instruction, assessment of student products, including performances, portfolios, and the use of technology (CIP, 7.1.25). Student interest and success were fostered though the use of multimedia activities, hands on activities, and project driven use of technology across the curriculum (CIP; 7.1.16). Some of the students preferred to do their work in the classroom, at home, during tutorials, or on-line. Some the teachers expected students to keep journals and at times, gave them oral examinations if needed. All of these modalities were modeled after the Effective Schools correlates (Dana Center, 1994). The AEP strived for high expectations and believed that _If students don‘t learn the way we teach, then we much teach the way they learn‖

(CIP, 7.1.25). Other non-traditional teaching methods included dual credit with the local colleges, individual lesson plans, career and technology courses, and modified clock hours to accommodate student work schedules (CIP; 7.1.17). The use of differentiated methods to engage students at the AEP was supported by prevailing research in this area (Labyer, 2004; Yates, 2005; Fulton, 2007).

Another factor that enticed returning students to enroll and remain at the AEP to conclude their studies were the small classes. The students at the AEP had heard that the classes were not crowed like they were at the high school (Barker & Gump, 1964; Bau & Shoenherr, 1971, p. 57; Diprete, 1982; Gottfredson, 1984; Levin, 1983; Morgan & Alwin, 1980; McPartland & McDill, 1977; U.S. Department of Justice, 1980; Compensatory Instruction, Appendix C; Toyryla, 2003; Brussow, 2007).

Self-paced work was another factor that attracted returning students to the AEP. The returning students had heard that the work could be completed at their own pace and that the teachers were helpful. The mission of the AEP stressed that students be held responsible for learning the content of the material through time on task and mastery learning. These were part of the Effective Schools correlates that were implemented at the AEP (CIP; 7.1.27); (Dana Center; 1994). Students at the AEP were expected to attend four hours of instruction per day with afternoon instruction offered through ―Open Doors‖ an open entry and open exit tutorial session held for students that needed extra help or that wanted to advance in their studies and get ahead. So students could work at a slow, but moderate pace or work faster to cover more material ahead of time. The campus goal was for 90% of the students to advance to the next grade or to

graduate (CIP; 7.1.27; Cary; 2009). This finding on self-pacing has been supported by other research in this area (Watson, 2001).

Maintaining a safe school climate helped to convince returning students to enroll and stay engaged at the AEP (Jones, 2006; Zwarych; 2004; Toyryla; 2003; Kujawa, 2006; Duggan, 2007). Students voiced how they had come to make clear and definite choices to enroll at the AEP when they had reached a point that they felt for their safety at the local high school. Many students were convinced, from initial AEP information, that they would do better academically to enroll at the AEP because the campus would be less crowded, more spacious, and with a smaller student enrollment (Gottfredson, 1984).

A very appealing piece of information for the student was to find out that the AEP campus had a reputation of being a drug free campus. None of the school personnel or students interviewed knew of any student that had ever been caught with drugs. Students heard about drugs, but they had no knowledge of who was actually using anything off the campus. All students replied that they had not had or knew of anyone on the campus that had been in trouble over any type of illegal substance. The students did; however, keep hearing that some students were smoking cigarettes. The AEP utilized Title IV Safe & Drug Free funding to ensure a safe environment that monitored for drugs, violence, and the presence of firearms and alcohol within the AEP. This funding provided for group and individual counseling for suicide and violence prevention, and conflict resolution. Routine visits by the drug sniffing dogs were visibly conducted throughout the year-inclusive during the week of this study. Monthly fire drills and a crisis management plan were practiced. In addition, Red Ribbon Week was observed and a Drug

Leadership conference was attended by teachers, parents, and students once a year (CIP; 7.1.42; Duggan, 2007; Toyryla, 2003; Kujawa, 2006; Zwarych, 2004; Butts, 2003).

Personal Related Rationale

Personal related reasons for returning and enrolling at the AEP were based on student interest in academic success, the opportunity to pass state assessments, a chance to improve attendance, pursuance of career and life goals, and the opportunity to ease the consequences of having dropped out. Although, some of the students were encouraged to attend once they found out they were already familiar with the campus principal.

Student interest in their own academic success motivated them to enroll in the AEP. Finding that returning students had an interest in their own academic success was one of the contributions of this study. Students voiced, once and again, that if they had remained at the high school they would probably be failing, not receiving any help, and that they would surely have had to spend another year struggling to work towards graduation. At the same time, students felt compelled to take advantage of the additional opportunities at the AEP to pass the State assessments that they had already failed at the high school. Students at the AEP had to work hard to pass the rigorous state exit examinations whether they were the TAAS or TAKS. If the students at the AEP failed the TAAS or TAKS Reading or Math, they were expected to attend mandatory tutoring sessions to prepare them to tackle the exams. They were required to take practice tests in the content areas that incorporated TAKS objectives and to take formative practice tests with the TAKS release tests (CIP; 7.1.57 and 7.1.58) In Texas, this has been one of the reasons that students

drop out, they simply give up trying to pass these exit level assessments (TEA, 1994, March, pgs. 4-5; Lavan, 2009).

Students also wanted to improve their attendance so that they could complete their studies without the hassle of having to use valuable time having to attend truancy court or by having to keep up with personal doctor‘s notes or excuses due to their babies being sick or hospitalized. The AEP helped students make a fresh start in a more congenial place to attend (Lopez, 2004; Hemzik 2006). The AEP helped students to improve their attendance by monitoring their daily attendance through attendance logs, color-coded tracking cards, phone calls to the home, and attendance charts posted in the classroom. Student incentives for attending included trips, lunches, breakfasts, rewards, and certificates for good and perfect attendance each six weeks. Students having difficulty attending were required to have individual conferences with their first period Focus teachers, counselor, and principal. School personnel also made home visits weekly to check on students and those out of compliance might have to be filed against in truancy court as mandated by the state (CIP; 7.1.1). Teachers were required to meet every 6 and 9 weeks to monitor not only student attendance, but also discipline and academic progress. If students had been absent 3 or more times, they were considered to have violated the 3 strike policy and they could face being asked to return to the local high school. This was something that students definitely, did not want to do.

This study also advanced knowledge in the field of research by making the following contributions as to the rationale returning dropouts have for making conscious decisions to return and complete their high school diplomas. One of the best reasons that students had for returning

to complete their high school coursework was because they had an interest in pursuing careers and other life goals. All of the students aspired to further their educations by attending local universities, colleges or enrolling in a branch of the military. The students clearly realized that they could not work in their chosen careers without their high school diplomas. The AEP facilitated the students by providing a well-balanced curriculum with a common core of coursework that was supplemented by strong academic and career oriented electives. Instruction focused on real work and life applications that provided learning experiences that prepared students for transition to the world of work after graduation (CIP; 7.17). The Career and Technology Education (CATE) program was utilized to provide the students with career pathways so that they could achieve both academic and occupational competencies. The CATE program helped the students to employ avenues such as concurrent-dual enrollment, articulated courses, tech-prep, and certification programs to meet student needs. Student career awareness was raised through career goals, orientation, and pathways which integrated both academic and occupational knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for entry into post-secondary education and/or employment. Each student had to carry their Pathways portfolio to the AEP from the high school. Once at the AEP they were purposefully enrolled in CATE courses that prepared them for gainful employment. The courses included Business Careers and Information Systems (BCIS), Career Connections, and an innovative course called Diversified Career Preparation (DCP). In addition, classes in the Family & Consumer Science were also available. The students were provided with community mentors, guest speakers, and a career fair (CIP; 7.1.12). Finally, the AEP supported transition to the world of work or higher education by maintaining a College & Career Guidance Center under the direction of the school counselor. Students could obtain

information about colleges, financial aid, scholarship, and job searches. All students were expected to visit the center at least twice during their enrollment by attending either group or individual career counseling (CIP; 7.1.14).

Another contributing factor advanced by this study is that students really did care about what other people thought about them for being dropouts. They worried about what society at large might think of them all the rest of their lives if they permanently dropped out of school. The students were especially concerned about what prospective employers might think about them if they had to apply for a job and state that they were dropouts. Thus to ease the consequences of already having dropped out, students made conscious choices to give school one more try by enrolling at the AEP.

A final contribution advanced by this study is that some of the students become interested in transferring into the AEP after they found out that their former elementary school principal was also the current principal at the AEP. They remembered having good rapport with him and it made them comfortable knowing that there was someone at the AEP that already knew them. This advances the notion that if students feel comfortable with school personnel because they already have a personal relationship or good rapport with these individuals than it is likely that they will remain engaged in attending a school environment where people know them as individuals, too.

Family Related Rationale

Students in this study also cited several family related reasons for returning back to school. These family related factors included family support or encouragement, positive role models in

siblings and peers that had been successful at the AEP, and also because of pressing teen parenting and familial responsibilities.

This study advances research in the area of returning dropouts by demonstrating that dropouts can be encouraged to return back to school through family support systems such as parents, peers, siblings, or their own parental responsibilities. Peers are included under the umbrella of family because many of these friends are or can be considered as close as a family member.

Some of the students that enrolled at the alternative education program made their decisions to enroll based on encouragement from their peers that were already at the AEP, or from peers and/or siblings that had already graduated from the AEP, from advice from the high school counselor, or because their family had encouraged them to transfer to the AEP. The AEP supported parental involvement with their students through different modes of communication such as parent conferences, newsletters, parents‘ participation as sponsors, speakers, volunteers, and through their assistance with celebrations. School personnel also made home visits, and telephone calls.

Students also had positive peer role models that had been successful at the AEP. The students had heard from these other students that the classes were smaller, that they would receive more one-on-one attention from the teachers, that the schedule was flexible and would allow them to study and work at the same time, or that child care would be provided for their babies. These peers would tell the students that if they were struggling or not passing at the high school to inquire about the AEP so that they too would be able to enroll in the program. The students were encouraged to see these peers happy about attending school and making plans for their futures.

The students would inquire about the AEP with their high school counselor who would help facilitate their transfer into the AEP. What was interesting about this is that the students had an informal avenue for gathering information about what to do about their academic failure at the high school. Many times, these failing students would share this information with other students who would orient them towards enrollment at the AEP.

Students that were teen parents realized that they had to think about raising their children and providing for them. Some of the students were living together or planning to get married so they aspired to move forward and be able to support their young children. They realized that they could not do this without their high school diploma. This study advances research in the area of returning dropouts by making it clear that these young parents have aspirations not only for themselves, but for their future lives, and the well-being of their children and that it is possible to reach them and encourage them to return back to school to complete their studies, especially if the proper student support systems or programs are in place.

Some of these students had to help sustain their immediate families by holding down part-time jobs (Lotto, 1982). Students in the study held part-time jobs or helped their parents to earn money by helping them to do what they did for a living, such as run a child care center out of one home. These demanding familial responsibilities gave some of the students the incentive that they needed to return to school to complete their studies. They returned with the hope of doing better in their lives so that they could continue to help their families.

Student and Stakeholder Perceived Effective Practices at the AEP

The selected study site revealed that there were several practices or traits in place within the AEP that encouraged students to return and complete their studies. In attempting to address this question, the qualitative data analysis revealed several themes that became apparent from the responses that the participants made during the interviews. These overall themes or practices involve: hiring the right personnel, monitoring academics, providing student support services, and by fostering a safe school climate. In addition, both school personnel and students cited that there was one practice that needed to be in place - the need to promote a positive public image for or about the AEP within the community-at-large and within the school district itself.

Hiring the Right Personnel

This theme encompassed several sub-themes such as teacher and staff training, principal leadership, teacher and staff commitment, and the human virtues of empathy, kindness, and caring.

To date, the federal government under No Child Left Behind requires that districts hire highly qualified teachers that are certified in their particular area or subject. Consequently, the state of Texas requires that teachers be certified in the areas of bilingual, English as a Second Language, gifted and talented, and in several specialties in the area of special education. The state checks that students that have been identified as needing assistance in these special areas are in fact receiving services from teachers that are certified or qualified to meet their needs. This usually takes place through what is known in Texas as the ―PEIMS Snapshot‖ verification

that takes place on the last day of October. District and school personnel must prove to the State of Texas that teachers have either the training required or the certification to serve students identified in these special programs. If a district is unable to provide these trained personnel to meet the students' needs, they must ask for waivers or permission from the state to allow students to continue being served by teachers that may not be either qualified or certified. Certification of school personnel is just the first stepping stone to providing students with the education that they need.

The practice of hiring the right personnel to serve student needs is one that is mandated to districts by both state and federal guidelines. Campuses; however, can and may require their teachers and staff to take additional training to better serve the needs of their student populations. The AEP was a small campus so its teachers had to be certified, at times, in more than one area so that they could provide instruction to students in several different subjects during the day. In addition, AEP campus personnel had completed training through book studies and professional development that enhanced teaching and learning. The teachers had also learned how to address the different learning styles of students by implementing instructional materials and activities to meet their needs (CIP; 7.1.31) The AEP had also increased opportunities for teachers and staff to develop professionally through a variety of formats including technology, and other staff development models (CIP; 6.1). The staff had been trained on Section 504 referral procedures, modifications, accommodations, tutoring, counseling procedures and participation in parent conferences (CIP; 7.1.4). As a result of the book study: From Rage to Hope by Crystal Kay Rendall, teachers were expected to collaborate on the implementation of strategies presented in

the book throughout the year (CIP; 7.1.24). In addition, teachers received training on how to work collaboratively as a team and on multi-cultural education (CIP; 7.1.26).

Teachers at the AEP received attended campus based or outside training with occasional trips to various national conferences or the local service center. Training involved topics that helped the teachers to address student needs such as: students of poverty, TAKS strategies, technology, teacher competencies, subject content matter, school culture, classroom management, student performance and motivation, use of the internet, A+ learning, conflict resolution, suicide prevention and violence prevention/intervention, strategies to teach all learners, and appreciation for diversity (CIP; 7.1.38). In addition, teachers were allowed opportunities for both professional and developmental growth throughout the year. The AEP wanted to retain quality personnel and recognized their birthdays, and gave them attendance incentives each 9 weeks. Teachers were also empowered to become resources for new teachers and other staff members through mentoring and training others to help build a collaborative school culture (CIP; 7.1.39; Montemayor, 2001; Lopez, 2004; Hemzik, 2006; Watson, 2001; Camak, 2007; Brussow, 2007; Jarrat, 2002; Hall, 2001).

There are other factors that come into consideration with regard to having the best personnel in place to serve the needs of the AEP student population. These factors surfaced as the need for teacher‘s to embrace virtues that help them to better understand and deal with students that may not fit the regular mold of what is considered to be a regular student. The virtues of teacher empathy, kindness, and caring surfaced during this study.

Students felt that teachers cared about them because they were rewarded for positive behavior at the awards assembly held at the end of the year, and through weekly classroom

recognition, the campus newsletter, field trips, and other incentives. These incentives included recognizing student birthdays, student of the week in each of the classrooms, most credits earned, celebrating students moving on to the next grade level in their studies, pizza luncheon, breakfast club, and recognizing attendance with prizes, certificates, and goodie bags (CIP; 7.1.30). Students also valued the time that they spent with adults on the campus especially individual and group counseling sessions with the counselor and at times, with their teachers. Teachers also accompanied students during their field trips to the local junior colleges leaving students with the impression that teachers cared about their futures (CIP; 7.1.29; Petty, 2008; De LA Ossa. 2010).

Monitoring Academic Progress

Everyone from the school secretary, the principal, the teachers, and the students knew what academic monitoring looked like within the alternative education program. Many times, the teachers and students could verbalize exactly what would happen if students overslept, or were missing assignments, or failed a test. However, many of these same students did not know if anything had been in place at the regular high school to monitor or help them to succeed. While attending the local high school, these students revealed that they had not known who to go to or who was in charge of what or who they could turn to for help with specific aspects of their lives. Within the alternative education program, the students quickly found out that they were known not only by the principal, but by their teachers. They did not feel lost within the school due to its smaller size. At the time of the study, there were a total of one principal, one counselor, a PEIMS clerk, a secretary, seven teachers, and sixty- seven students. The students

knew that someone at the school would be calling them either by phone or in person at their homes or apartments to find out why they were not at school for the day. Many times, these people would be the principal himself, the counselor, or a teacher. This type of diligent monitoring is something that would never or rarely ever happen in a large high school.

The fact that the alternative program was located on its own campus helped to provide boundaries for the students. It was their campus, their school, and their chosen program. The smallness of the alternative program allowed for the students to be known to everyone that worked or was in charge of the school (Toyryla (2003). The students enjoyed being recognized by name and this boosted their feelings of self-esteem and personal self-worth (De la Ossa, 2010). Students really could not mess up with completion of their programs. The students were on strict attendance and academic contracts that were monitored by the teachers, the principal, and the counselor. If the students did not demonstrate academic progress or complied with daily attendance, they could be asked to go back to the high school. According to the principal and several of the students interviewed during the semester that this study was conducted, at least one student had been asked to go back to the high school during this time because they were not complying with attendance at the alternative education program. The fact that this event was visibly evident at least once per semester made the students more aware of the consequences of being truant and they became more determined to do well so that they would not run the risk of being asked to leave the alternative campus. Some of the students voiced with certainty that if they had to return to the high school it would mean that they would probably not graduate.

School districts have been hard pressed to reduce costs and the typical manner in which this is done is by building larger and larger schools. Berlin and Cienkus (1989) conducted a

literature review of Education and Urban Society and found that the articles tended to show that smaller is better for districts, school, and classes. A second finding was that low-SES children benefited more from smaller educational environments than higher-SES children. Another conclusion was that children's educational needs, rather than the schools organizational needs should be the overriding concern when determining how instruction is organized and conducted.

Providing Student Support Services

Student support services consisted of active community, parental and peer, special programs, and transitional supports available to boost students' self-esteem and moral as they struggled to complete their studies. Many times, the students were also facing other obstacles in their lives while attending the alternative education program. These visible supports sustained students' desires to continue working towards their goal of graduating from the program. Student support services at the AEP consisted of day care for their children, breakfast in the morning, a flexible schedule, open door tutoring in the afternoon, van transportation to and from the school, counseling in both group and individual sessions, field trips to local colleges and the local university to help them make a transition to post-secondary education. Students were also expected to take the ACT and SAT examinations so that these would already be in place should they decide to later on enroll in college or one of the local trade schools available in the area.

Maintaining a Safe School Climate

This last theme was made up of one sub-theme: safe schools and campus climate. This particular theme could not be ignored. Basically, both groups, the students, and administrators, teachers, and staff overwhelmingly stated that drugs, fighting, theft, instances of insubordination,

or weapons were virtually non-existent at the alternative education program. This provided a calm working atmosphere for students to attend and to learn (Toyryla, 2003). Several of the students that were interviewed stated that they had been suspended, removed to the disciplinary alternative education program, or had not been able to participate in sports or other programs because they were constantly having to defend themselves from acts of bullying, harassment or physical acts of violence from other students at the high school (Coley, 1995). These students made it clear that attending the alternative education program solved these issues for them because they were separated from their aggressors and that everyone understood the rules that were in place at the AEP.

School personnel were expected to handle discipline in a proactive way instead of a reactive approach. The expectation was that campus climate would create, capture, and celebrate school culture in a positive learning environment (CIP; 7.1.8). Positive student behavior was stressed and rewarded throughout year and through end of year awards assembly, weekly recognition, campus newsletters, field trips, and other incentives such as goody bags (CIP; 7.1.18) Even classrooms were expected to run smoothly in order to facilitate instruction by maintaining all equipment in working order; while, teachers had easy access to school supplies (CIP; 7.1.13).

Additional Finding: Need to Promote a Positive Public Image of the AEP

This theme consisted of two sub-themes: a need to promote a positive school image and a need to promote the value of the AEP to the community. Both teachers, staff, and students voiced that the public did not know enough about what the alternative education program was about and this made these individuals upset. The teachers gave examples of how this

misinformation was even pervasive amongst other district personnel and this made them angry. Students felt that the public, in general, saw them as being ―bad‖ students because they were attending the alternative program. The students voiced how they were constantly having to tell people in the community that they were not at the AEP because they parents, bad kids, or were incarcerated. Both teachers and students would have to inform family, friends, and community members of the benefits of the AEP and how the school was really a positive place and helping them to graduate. Students and teachers resisted the negative public perceptions and kept on working or attending the AEP (Yates, 2005). Many times, the students said that community members were surprised to learn that the AEP was a school that helped students to graduate. This additional theme was demonstrated that there was a need for the school district and the AEP to work together to promote or fully practice the public relations strategies that were in the CIP. The strategies that promoted the value of the AEP were in place, but were mainly geared to parents of students' attending the AEP and not too much for the community at-large or for use at the district level (CIP, 7.1.37; 7.1.35; 7.1.36).

Conclusion

The preliminary themes that emerged early in this study indicated that the alternative education program provided benefits for both school personnel and the students. Students benefited from the individualized attention, self-paced work, academic transition, and flexible scheduling. School personnel experienced intrinsically rewarding work, creative academic flexibility, smaller class sizes, opportunities to teach character education, and the time to foster academic relationships with the students.

This study also suggests that alternative education programs can be successful with students that share the following characteristics: economically disadvantaged, teen parents, academically challenged, responsible to their immediate families, self- supporting, subject to disciplinary actions, challenged by state assessments, familiar with consequences of dropping out, self-motivated, and even those being confronted by multiple setbacks. Knowledge of these characteristics may lead to early identification with specific interventions for these students to assist them to complete their studies.

> Student characteristics in this study ranged from failing a particular subject, to having fallen behind in their studies due to absences attributed to their work or familial responsibilities, or even worse for having been involved in fights while attending the local high school. Some students had already fallen academically behind while attending other schools located outside the study site. Subsequently, they only remained at the local high school for a year or two before transferring to the AEP. Almost all of the students heard about the AEP from other students and then made inquiries with the high school counselor or teachers. Some of the students had also wanted to transfer into the AEP after they found out that their elementary school principal would also be their current principal at the AEP. They remembered having good rapport with him then and it made them feel more comfortable knowing that there was someone there that they already knew.

Students at the study site had three main reasons contributing to their decisions to return and complete their studies. These included school, personal, and familial reasons for having made a decision to enroll in the AEP. The students clearly voiced that they knew that this was a ―last chance‖ program for them and they tried to attend each day, keep up their studies, complete their ―make-up‖ work, and tried to mind their own business.

Some of the students made decisions based on their parenting needs that could be met through various programs available at the AEP such as the PEP program and its parenting classes, van transportation, and the in-school child care center. All of the students seemed positively sure that they would be graduating from the AEP and that they would continue with post-secondary

studies or training leading them towards a rewarding career. Every student felt that they had positive rapport with the principal and their teachers to the point that they could discuss personal problems stemming from the home. All of the students were attending afternoon Open Door tutorials for additional instruction to help them pass the TAKS tests. The students appeared pretty confident that they had made the right choice for themselves and looked forward to graduating from the AEP once they passed their state exit level examinations and earned their credits. All five students that were interviewed had set goals for themselves after graduation that would help them achieve their career and life goals.

Several effective practices are conducive to student success. These practices included: hiring the right personnel, monitoring academic progress, providing student support services, and maintaining a safe school climate so that students were able to attend in comfort, learn, and succeed academically. The study also revealed and additional theme. The teachers and the students strongly felt that there was a need to promote the value of the AEP through a positive public relations campaign to improve the image of the program.

This study suggests that this particular alternative education program was successful because the administrators, teachers, and staff that delivered educational services to the students were the best personal that could be hired to work with this particular type of student. They were well trained in their craft and exhibited personal qualities such as patience and understanding; in addition, they demonstrated that they had strong work ethics and made sure that students were successful. They conducted monitoring of student academic progress though a coordinated effort that involved all the student‘s teachers and counselor through use of the ―lack sheet,‖

individual counseling with students as needed, phone calls to the home, home visits, or required parent conferences with the specific area teachers or principal. Even though the campus did not provide special state or federal programs such as the Gifted and Talented program or the Bilingual program amongst others, the teachers still made linguistic accommodations as needed or designed very specific and challenging lessons for students that had a need to excel over and above the regular students.

At the same time, the campus provided students with other tangible support services such as van transportation to and from their home and a child care center so that their children would be taken care of during the day while they studied towards their high school degrees. Finally, many of the students repeatedly brought up the fact that the campus climate was so different from the chaotic one that they had left behind at the high school. Students seemed motivated, focused, and ready to learn instead of having to wonder if they were going to be involved in some sort of disciplinary issue, or if a teacher was not going to listen to them, or have to worry because they could not complete their work in time to hand it in right away.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the study findings, several recommendations are advanced. Alternative schools may continue to be a positive choice for students who return to complete high school by considering the following three recommendations.

The First Recommendation

The first recommendation of this study is that practitioners in education would do well to know the characteristics of dropouts so that they can better design programs that meet or support these students so that they are successful in earning their high school diploma.

In this study the following student characteristics were identified. The students were economically disadvantaged, teen parents, academically challenged, responsible to their immediate families, self-supporting, subject to disciplinary actions, challenged by state assessments, familiar with the consequences of dropping out, self-motivated, and at times, confronted by multiple setbacks. Sometimes, these same returning student characteristics later become their rationale for making a decision to return and complete their studies. An example of such a case in this study is one of the female students that dropped out of the high school due to her pregnancy, but later after the baby was born, this teen parent enrolled at the AEP to complete her high school studies (Olivo, 2003). Practitioners should design or establish AEP programs that meet the needs of students based on these identified characteristics.

The Second Recommendation

The second recommendation for practitioners in education is that having knowledge of the reasons why dropouts return to complete their studies can be helpful in structuring AEP programs so that the proper supports are in place to motivate them not only to return, but to remain engaged until they do graduate.

This study showed that students had school related reasons for returning to enroll at an AEP to complete their high school studies. The curriculum at the AEP engaged the students because the

material was self-paced and most of it was delivered or available through the A-Plus computer software. Educational practitioners should also plan to deliver engaging curriculum in innovative ways other than just lecturing to students (Lotto, 1982). Even though many teachers still used the textbook and other supplemental materials cogent to the subject matter that they were responsible for teaching, the students had access to other modalities of curriculum delivery such as the A-Plus computer system.

Flexible scheduling involves more than just the facilitation of the delivery of curriculum (Quinn & Rutherford, 1998). The very structure of the day within the AEP engaged the students for the curriculum that they would be learning through the individualized attention they received in their morning classes. The in-class breakfast that was served provided the teachers and the students with a chance to converse prior to having to focus on the impending lessons of the day. Providing students with flexible schedules affords them time to work part-time, or tend to familial or personnel responsibilities (Lotto, 1982, McDill, Natrello, & Pallas, 1986). Students at the AEP liked the flexibility that the scheduling allowed them so that they could contemplate whether or not they could work in a part-time position to earn money, help their families with assistance in case of illnesses, or help out in family owned businesses.

Practitioners should strive to provide smaller class settings conducive to academic learning for students (Barker & Gump, 1964; Blau & Shoenherr, 1971, p. 57; Diprete, 1982; Gottfredson, 1984; Levin, 1983; Morgan & Alwin, 1980; McPartland & McDill, 1977; U.S. Department of Justice, 1980, Appendix 3; Neumann, 1994; March, p. 548). Each of the five student participants in this study had a story or stories to tell of how they felt at the large and overcrowded high

school and of the fights and other drama that occurred there on a daily basis. In contrast, they enjoyed the small class sizes and large roomy classrooms with lots of nooks and areas to complete their work. The students were afforded opportunities to provide their teachers with differentiated products of their work especially in the area of science and social studies.

They found the campus climate at the small alternative education campus to be inviting, relaxing, and safe, but at the same time a focused and serious place to tend to their studies. Acculturating the practice of community to improve campus climate within schools, so that students feel like they belong and matter and that people will really listen to them when they have a problem is something that the students at the AEP appreciated in contrast to the campus climate that they had experienced at the high school (Neumann, 1994, March, p. 548). AEP students in this study were made to feel like they were important in their new community where people knew who they were by name, where they lived, and who they were living with, too. The students felt that the teachers had time to listen to them and that they could approach them with personal problems that might be stemming from the home or as a result of academic difficulties that they were experiencing. Educators at the AEP strived to maintain a climate of mutual respect in their professional and academic relationships with students and to be role models so that students could learn how to mutually respect one another and conduct themselves, too (Gottfredson, 1984).

The students felt that the faculty and staff at the AEP respected them and showed them acts of kindness that they would never have expected from their regular teachers at the high school. Simple things like knowing when their birthdays were, where they lived, making home visits, or

addressing them in a respectful way meant a lot to students that rarely had any interaction with their harried teachers at the high school. In addition, student could attend the AEP and feel at ease that the campus provided childcare for their babies while they studied.

Schools should have systems in place for monitoring student attendance (Montecel, 1997). In this study, the student enrolled at the AEP, quickly discovered that their attendance was diligently monitored through morning wake up calls, home visits, or by other students that called them to help them get to school on time. If the students chose not to comply with attendance, the personnel at the AEP filed a case against them in truancy court. Student interviews found that students wanted a second chance to prove that they could attend school on a regular basis if they were given the chance to concentrate on their studies instead of other things like being involved in disciplinary issues like they had at the high school.

This study also discovered that students also had personal related goals for making a decision to return to school. It is imperative that AEPs shift to transitioning students to post-secondary education so that students are able to pursue career and other life goals. Students should be afforded opportunities to become familiar with the class offerings of both two and four-year community institutions so that they can start to formulate educational plans beyond high school. Both teachers and students were aware that if the AEP did not exist that many of the students would more than likely have dropped out altogether from the high school. Many students firmly stated that they were positive that they would have continued to struggle at the local high school until they would eventually have dropped out, altogether. All of the students saw their graduation from the AEP as a bridge to other endeavors in their future lives. All students had

made tentative plans to continue their studies in one of the local two-year colleges or four-year universities. The students had mapped out mental plans of where they hoped to be in six months, one year, and up to five years from the date the study was conducted.

Finally, this study revealed that students had family related reasons for returning back to complete their high school studies. Parental and peer support are invaluable to students who subsequently do well with their encouragement and counseling (Odell, 1974; Romig, 1978; U.S. Department of Justice, 1980, Appendix 3). Some of the students had a ―significant other‖ already in their lives that encouraged them to finish their studies, too (S4: 15; 11-23). The students seemed to have an unofficial and loose support system where they traded information about services available at the AEP, and where they supported one another by providing one another with transportation to and from the campus as needed. At times, they also gave one another wake up calls or made morning home visits to wake up their school buddies.

This triad of school, family, community, and peer support motivated and encouraged the students at the AEP to keep attending and complete their course work (Montecel, 1997). The AEP required parents to volunteer during four activities during the year and to serve on various committees as requirement of having their children attend the AEP. Schools should work with parents to implement programmatic and systemic avenues so that they can be actively incorporated into the educational setting to help their children experience academic success. Educators should implement strong parental and student support systems that facilitate that students continue attending school and feel encouraged to complete their studies (Ramsey, 1988; Montecel, 1997).

Third Recommendation

The third recommendation is that the effective practices found in this study can be implemented in other AEPs or similar programs that recover dropouts to facilitate their success in completing their studies.

One of these effective practices is that schools hire the best or just the right personnel or teachers to teach at-risk students (Neumann, 1994, March, p. 548). When this cannot be accomplished through hiring practices then training should be implemented to sensitize the teachers on how to best work with at-risk students (Neumann, 1994, March, p. 548; Quinn & Rutherford, 1998).

One of the added benefits of hiring the right teachers to work with the dropouts in this study was that these teachers turned out to understanding or sympathetic to students‘ plights. The study revealed that some of the teachers empathized with the students‘ plights or struggles that they were experiencing because they too had to endure their own educational struggles due to lack of money, marrying too young, or having familial responsibilities at very young ages. This understanding of where the students were coming from helped the teachers to bond or to understand the students without being too lenient on them. The teachers instead often demanded more of these students because they knew just how far behind they were and how much further they needed to progress in order to pass the TAKS and to complete the additional coursework that was required to earn credits towards graduation. The teachers were able to do this through the one-to-one attention that they dedicated to each student during the regular morning session and later on a more individualized setting of the afternoon tutorial session. The students noted that this was not something that they had experienced at the high school.

The practice of hiring the right personnel turned out to be the foundation of this study. The teachers at the alternative education program apparently made a difference at the school and in students‘ lives. The teachers went out of their way to help the students to succeed. The teachers understand that they were the adults and these students were on their way to being adults and required much guidance and counseling to help them maneuver their way into adulthood. Our teacher preparation programs should emphasize human development to better aid teachers to understand that not all students come from the same backgrounds and that the first step to understanding a student is to really know who they are and where they are coming from and where they want to go in their futures.

Strong campus leadership is preferred on campuses such as this AEP that was fortunate to have had a strong ex-principal during its past ten years. The current principal or the principal at the AEP at the time of the study was also described by students and campus personnel as being a strong leader. Hiring practices should also strive to hire competent campus leaders such as was found at the AEP. This study demonstrated that even on a small campus like this AEP that normally had about 100 students enrolled, the principal was the focal point of directions for staff, teachers, students, and parents. If anything needed to be or if anything went wrong he was the man to handle it. He used his many years of real-world experience both in the oil fields and within the discipline of education to handle difficult problems or situations. He was also the liaison between the central office administrators and his campus so he was prepared to speak up for them and to make sure that their drop out recovery program was excelling in their mission to graduate the students with their high school degrees.

The teachers at the AEP were very committed to their work and had strong work ethics. They felt that their work was very important and that this work transcended beyond just coming to work every day and receiving a paycheck. The principal gave examples of how every teacher volunteered to teach for several hours after school the first year that he came on board because he did not have any money to pay them. Not one of the teachers complained or turned him down. In addition, the teachers had taken on the additional responsibility of teaching other students that came over from the high school because they had heard that they could get help at the AEP during those evening tutorials. The teachers had a deep sense of responsibility not only for the student in front of them, but for the students' future children and families. They clearly understood that if the student in front of them did not succeed then their families would also suffer the generational consequences of dropping out.

Schools should monitor student academic progress as part of being accountable for their learning (Montecel, 1997). In this AEP, students also discovered that they were responsible for keeping up with their ―Lack Sheets,‖ a system of personal responsibility that was supported not only by the teachers, but by the counselor at the AEP. This system made the students aware of how many more credits they still needed to earn in order to graduate.

Providing various student support services can facilitate student success. The AEP implemented transitional supports that facilitated student transition into the work place or into a post-secondary school for additional education or career certification. This support to the world of work was accomplished through arranged field trips or visits to the local colleges, job sites, or through information gathered through the campus internet for out-of-state colleges, universities,

or other programs that would lead them to certification in a chosen profession. The parenting students also received parenting support and classes though the PEP program so that they could transition successfully into their parental roles with their growing babies.

In this study, all campus personnel were versed in how to communicate with the students and give them personal attention from the moment that they arrived at the front office to register in the AEP. In this study, students indicated that they felt like they belonged at the AEP from the very beginning. Attention was given to them right from the time that they made their applications, to the contact that they had with the principal during the parent and student interview in his office, to how the secretary greeted them at the front desk. This practice helped school personnel monitor and later communicate student progress, not only to the students, but to their parents, and other campus personnel that need to know how the students were progressing academically. Practitioners could employ school personnel to make initial contact with the students in the form of transitional activities such as pre-registration or transition camps in order to familiarize the students with school personnel and their new school.

School counselors at the AEP had the opportunity to speak with the students about what to expect once they enrolled at the AEP and how it might benefit them. School personnel involved in this initial stage of inducting the student into the AEP were knowledgeable about their duties and of the processes that needed to be followed in order to bring a new student on board. People knew how to effectively do their jobs and to follow through for the sake of making the new students feel welcomed into their new campus (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2001).

Teachers in this study were also well-trained and at times served in more than one capacity or were responsible for teaching more than one subject in order to get to know students on a personnel basis (Quinn & Rutherford, 1998; Neumann, 1994, March, p. 548). This could also be accomplished though the sponsorship of various clubs within the school. In this study, many of the teachers at the AEP had multiple certifications in the various subjects and this came in handy when they had to teach more than one subject. Many teachers expressed that they loved to teach the courses that they held certifications for and that they loved working with students that needed a lot of help or that were way beyond even though it could be or get overwhelming and challenging at times.

Credit recovery schools should meet the needs of all students by supporting special programs such as the Gifted and Talented program the Bilingual/ESL program and so forth. Schools should provide students with cogent programs that provide them the support that they need to graduate. A final theme garnered from the study of the AEP was that the students were aware of the services that were available at the AEP and they were grateful for such programs such as the PEP program, the day care, the van transportation, the additional tutorial session, the field trips, the community involvement and other events that engaged them to be a part of the school‘s community. The students understood that the services that were being provided helped them and other students to graduate.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research study included a single site and the findings can only be generalized to this particular site based on observations, document review, and interviews. It is advisable that

future researchers that wish to replicate this study strive to include a study site that has proven to be successful with returning students. The foremost criteria that should be used to select future sites of study should be the success rate with students that graduate or complete their studies.

Another recommendation for future research should be to select a study sites where all of the pertinent personnel that work with the students on a daily basis are included so that a more thorough and holistic picture of dropouts can be obtained. One of the shortcomings of this study was that the counselor and PEIMS clerk had only been at the alternative education program for less than three months. At the same time, central office personnel such as the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and the district's superintendent were not good candidates for the study as they too had only been at their positions for less than three months. The superintendent had come from outside the district so he did not have a history with the principal or the program; although, he reassured the alternative education principal that he would not be cutting the program, but that he would be looking at its future viability. A just compensation for this shortcoming of not having any central office personnel included in this study is that the associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction recommended that the previous or ex-principal of the selected AEP be asked to participate in the study. This was a logical substitution because the ex-principal had once been the associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction prior to becoming the founder and principal of the AEP selected for this study. Her historical contribution to this study was invaluable.

This study also attempted to obtain parental input through a campus roundtable, but despite invitations and phone calls, only one parent volunteered to be interviewed at his home as

he was homebound due to both medical and physical disabilities. Future research should attempt to schedule a parent roundtable either late in the evening or on a weekend. What matters is that input from more parents be obtained.

In addition, should anyone else attempt to replicate this study, it is strongly suggested that the selection of a district include an alternative program that has been active for a number of years. The study results would benefit by being able to include the same stable staff at the campus and central office levels. Overall, the decision to primarily interview the personnel at the alternative education program that had been teaching for at least five years within the program ensured that the best people with direct knowledge of the AEP be interviewed for this study. Each of these individuals had to speak from the heart, not only about their role within the program, but about the roles that they felt or saw other teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and the community play within the alternative program. Overall, it would be advisable that comprehensive sampling be used to include all faculty and staff at the AEP level. In this study, their input as a faculty, staff, and learning community were instrumental in being able to obtain a holistic picture of what they considered to be successful practices within the program that helped students to graduate.

A final recommendation for further research is that even though a qualitative case-based approach was utilized in this single site study, this same methodological approach can be employed with multiple sites to gain a broader perspective from the various individuals located within comparable AEP programs. Case-based approaches can be useful if a the proposed research results will be used specifically to gather information about a specific research site that is in need of improvements, as in the case of conducting a needs assessment for a particular

campus. When case-based methodology is used to explore a single site it can be a source of powerful information that will allow the researchers to act immediately or to plan for long-term implementation of new strategies for improvement. Researchers conducting large-scale survey-based approaches might choose to incorporate the findings of this research into their survey instruments to determine if the findings have validity across multiple study sites similar to the AEP in this study. Since many of the finding is this study were corroborated through prior and ongoing research in the specialized field of dropout studies, it is expected that future results attempting to replicate this study would have similar results. Since the selected study site used in this doctoral research was highly successful in graduating students, an additional question to pose to students in future studies would be: If you could design the school of your dreams, what would it look like? What programs should be in place so that students do not drop out? Some of the variables that should be considered for further research are variables dealing with student motivation to complete high school studies, and career and long term plans. Information on these two variables may be crucial to designing schools that not only entice students to return to complete their studies, but that engage them to complete their studies and make their way to post-secondary education or training requiring certification for gainful employment.

Closing Statement

As a novice teacher, an administrator once told me, ―This is the toughest job that you will ever do in your life.‖ I have lived this life for twenty-three years, and I cannot explain to regular laymen just what I do or just what I go through on a regular basis as a school administrator. I am in the business of making people happy, my supervisors, central office staff, community

representatives, my teachers, the parents, and the students. All of this, while trying to educate each individual student to their fullest potential and at the same time meeting their specific educational needs through special programs. Never mind the logistics that it takes to run a school like clockwork each and every day. It takes everyone in the school community to run a school to its maximum potential. We live in an age where taxpayers think it is taking too much money to run schools and they feel like they are not getting enough bang for their buck, so the criticism in the newspaper hurts. It really hurts when you are trying to do your best to educate students, many times with little or no funding to carryout programs or events that really matter.

On a daily basis, educators are barraged by the political talk shows, evening news, and the newspaper that is tossed at their front steps proclaiming that schools are failing, that dropout rates are high, and that teachers are not competent. It is no wonder that teachers drop out of their chosen profession before they have completed their fifth year in the classroom. School personnel have to be mentally tough to be assaulted like this on a daily basis about your chosen profession. It does not help that family members may not understand why you even chose to go into education or worse they do not understand what could be so hard about being a teacher or a campus administrator.

The public does not understand that teachers are on display all day as they perform to deliver the mandated curriculum set by the state or that they have to show progress for each of their students regardless of that student‘s background or lack of support from their home. The conditions in teaching are only for unique and resilient individuals and for ones that are willing to make the changes in their personal constitutions to work in this type of environment, to do what they love to do - teach. A final point to ponder is that if schools are this tough on school

personnel‘s constitutions, how can we realistically hope or think that all students can survive in these types of existing educational settings until they complete their educational studies?

This study suggests that traditional high schools can do much better or follow different strategies to engage and keep students in school so that they do not end up dropping out. Alternative schools have much to offer to this special group of students that have difficulty maneuvering their way through traditional settings. The recommendations made in this study are not all inclusive, but they are the salient ones derived from this doctoral endeavor.

Appendix A
Standard versus Alternative Accountability System in Texas

	Standard Accountability	**Alternative Accountability**
Campuses Covered	Applicable to all campuses **other than those** that register for and are eligible to receive an alternative education accountability rating.	**ONLY** applicable to campuses that register for and are eligible to receive an alternative education accountability rating. **Registration is required annually.**
Ratings Issued	*Exemplary* *Recognized* *Acceptable* *Low-performing*	*Commended* *Acceptable* *Needs peer Review* *Not Rated*
TAAS Passing Rates-Spring 2002	*Exemplary*-- at least 90.0% passing each of R, M, W (all students and each student group) and 90.0% passing SS (all students) *Recognized*-- at least 80.0% passing each of R, M, W (all students and each student group) and 80.0% passing SS (all students) *Acceptable*-- at least 55.0% passing each of R, M, W(All students and each student group) and 55.0% passing SS (all students) *Low-performing*-- below 55.0% passing in any of R, M, W (All students or any student group) or below 55.0% passing SS (all students)	*Commended*-- at least 30.0% passing each of R and M (all students and each student group) *Acceptable*-- at least 30.0% passing each of R and M (all students) *Needs peer Review*-- below 30.0% passing in R or M (all students)

Source: TEA, 2001, July, p. 8.

APPENDIX A - continued

	Standard Accountability	Alternative Accountability
2000-2001 Dropout Rate	*Exemplary*-- 1.0% or less (all students and each student group) *Recognized*-- 3.0% or less (all students and each student group) *Acceptable*-- 5.5% or less (all students and each student group) *Low-performing*-- above 5.5% (all students or any student group)	*Commended*-- 6.0% or less (all students and each student group) *Acceptable*-- 10.0% or less (all students) *Needs peer Review*-- above 10.0% (all students)
2000-2001 Student Attendance	Not Included as a Base Indicator	*Commended*-- 94.0% or higher (all students and each student group) *Acceptable*-- 80.0% or higher (all students) *Needs peer Review*-- below 80.0% (all students)
TLI Growth	Not Included as a Base Indicator	*Commended*-- 85.0% of all students with current and previous TAAS scores must demonstrate TLI growth *Acceptable*-- Not a Base Indicator
Additional Indicators		*Commended* - Must meet the campus-selected Additional Indicators(s) from the choices specified in this **2002 Alternative Education Accountability Manual)** *Acceptable* - Must meet the campus-selected Additional Indicators(s) (from the choices specified in this **2002 Alternative Education Accountability Manual)**
Not Rated		*Not Rated* - less than 10 long-term students for the school year
Ratings Issued	August 2002	August 2002

+ **Student groups are:** African-American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged
+ **Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) Subject Abbreviations: R=** Reading, **M=** Math**, W=** Writing**, SS=** Social Studies
Source: TEA, 2001, July, p. 9.

APPENDIX B

Comparison of Selected Assessment and Accountability Provisions Texas and NCLB

	Texas Education Code Or Texas Administrative Code	*No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001
Subjects	Reading Mathematics Writing English Language Arts Science Social Studies	Reading/Language Arts Mathematics Science (phased in later)
Grades	3-11	3-8 and either 10, 11, or 12
Assessments	TAKS & SDAA	TAKS, SDAA, RPTE & local assessments
Student Groups	All students African American Hispanic White Economically Disadvantaged	All Students African American Hispanic White Economically Disadvantaged Special Education Limited English Proficient
Student Mobility	District Mobility	Campus Mobility
Student Testing Policies	90/95% of district's students receiving special education services tested; Data investigations	95% tested at campus/district; ½% ARD exemption limitation (?)* * final regulations pending
Minimum Size Criteria	30/10%/50	Performance: 30 for all students, 50/10%/200 For groups Participation: 40 for all students and each group
Alternative Education Campuses	Separate Ratings System	All campuses must be evaluated for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)
Interventions & Sanctions	Low Performing	Not meeting AYP
Data Quality Requirements	For ISD to be Exemplary or Recognized; Data Investigations	N/A

Source: TEA, (n.d.), p. 12

Appendix C

Statutory Requirements Regarding Compensatory, Intensive, and Accelerated Instruction

Pursuant to Section 29.081(b) of the TEC, school districts in Texas are required to provide accelerated instruction to students who are ―at risk of dropping out of school.‖ In addition, school districts are required to evaluate and document the effectiveness of the accelerated instruction in reducing the dropout rate and in increasing achievement‖ of students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Section 29.08(d) of the TEC **was effective through August 31, 2001.**

Senate Bill 702 enacted by the 77th Texas Legislature amended Section 29.081(d) of the TEC **as of September 1, 2001** to read as follows:

(e) For purposes of this section, ―student at risk of dropping out of school‖ includes each student who is under 21 years of age and who:

(1) was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years;
(2) if the student is in grade 7, 8, 9, 11, or 12, did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding or current school year or is not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester;
(3) did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student under Subchapter B, Chapter 39, and who has not in the previous or current school year subsequently performed on that instrument or another appropriate instrument at a level equal to at least 110 percent of the level of satisfactory performance on that instrument;
(4) if the student is in pre kindergarten, kindergarten, or grade 1, 2, or 3, did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year;
(5) is pregnant or is a parent;
(6) has been placed in an alternative education program in accordance with Section 37.006 during the preceding or current school year;
(7) has been expelled in accordance with Section 37.007 during the preceding or current school year;
(8) is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release;
(9) was previously reported through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to have dropped out of school;
(10) is a student of English proficiency, as defined by Section 29.052

(11) is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and regulatory Services or has, during the school year, been referred to the department by a school official, officer of the juvenile court, or law enforcement official;
(12) is homeless, as defined 42 U.S.C. Section 11302, and its subsequent amendments; or
(13) resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility in the district, including a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house, or foster group home.

Senate Bill 702 also amended subsections (a) and (c) of TEC Section 29.081 and added Section 29-081(g) **effective September 1**, (revisions shown by underline):

(a) Each school district shall use the student performance data resulting from the basic skills assessment instruments and achievement tests administered under Subchapter B, Chapter 39, to design and implement appropriate compensatory, intensive, or accelerated instructional services for students in the district's schools that enable in the students to be performing at grade level at the next regular school term.

(c) Each school district shall evaluate and document the effectiveness of the accelerated instruction in reducing any disparity in performance in assessment instruments administered under Subchapter B, Chapter 39, or disparity in the rates of high school completion between students at risk of dropping out of school and all other district students.

(g) In addition to students described by Subsection (d), a student who satisfies local eligibility criteria adopted by the board of trustees of a school district may receive instructional services under this section. The number of students receiving services under this subsection during a school year may not exceed 10 percent of the number of students described by Subsection (d) who received services from the district during the preceding school year.

For students who are ―at risk of dropping out of school‖ due to the fact that they have not performed satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered under Subchapter B of Chapter 39 of the TEC, school districts are required to offer an intensive program of instruction. See TEC §39.024(b). **This intensive program of instruction is required to be designed to enable the student in question to be performing at grade level at the conclusion of the next regular school term or to attain a standard of annual growth specified by TEA.** For a special education student, the intensive program of instruction is required to be designed by the student's admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee

to enable the student to attain a standard of annual growth on the basis of the student's individualized education program. See TEC § 39.024(b).

For students who are pregnant or who are parents, districts are required to provide integrated programs of educational and support services which include:

(1) individual counseling, peer counseling, and self-help programs;
(2) career counseling and job readiness training;
(3) day care for the students' children on the campus or at a day-care facility in close proximity to the campus;
(4) transportation for children of students to and from the campus or day-care facility;
(5) transportation for student, as appropriate, to and from the campus or day-care facility;
(6) instruction related to knowledge and skills in child development, parenting, and home and family living; and
(7) assistance to students in the program in obtaining available services from government agencies or community service organization, including prenatal and postnatal health and nutrition program. See TEC § 29.085(b).

(Source: 2002 Alternative Education Accountability Manual: Alternative Education Accountability Ratings Procedures for 2002 Ratings for Texas Public School Campuses, Texas Education Agency, Department of Quality, Compliance, and Accountability Reviews, July 2001, pgs. 4-7.

Appendix D
Letter to Superintendent

DATE: May 7, 2004
TO: Dr. XXXX XXXXX
Superintendent of XXXX ISD
XXXXX Street
XXXX, Texas
RE: Research Consent

Dear Dr. XXXX XXXXX:

I am requesting your approval to conduct my doctoral dissertation within your district. The tentative title of my dissertation is: Reasons for Reentry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program. Your alternative education program (AEP) was one of seven in the state of Texas to have achieved the rating of *Commended* from the Texas Education Agency's Division of Registered Alternative Education Programs during the 2001-02 school-years. In addition, your public AEP campus met the following proposed study criteria: the campus, the district, and region met or exceeded the state's average of 50.5 percent economically disadvantaged enrollment for the 2001-2002 school year; the campus includes Grades 9-12 which are associated with high dropout rates; the district and campus have the potential to provide for input from all four ethnic groups: White, African-American, Hispanic and Other; and the local high school is the direct feeder for student enrollment in the AEP.

The proposed research project is a case study in which data will be collected through an initial questionnaire, and individual and focus group interviews, documents review, and classroom, front office, and general campus observations. The use of these observations will help discern effective practices that may be in place.

The interviews involve three different sessions lasting approximately thirty minutes to ninety minutes in duration. Participants included in the study will be given full anonymity and confidentiality, the right to stop all interviews as needed or to altogether refrain from being a participant before or during the study. Data collection techniques will carefully utilize the assignment of specific codes to the district and campus names and to any other information or personnel so that the identity of the study site and its participants are not revealed.

The study proposes to answer the following three questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the Grade 9-12 students that have dropped out, but then decide to return back to school to complete their studies in a selected alternative education program?

2. What are the reasons that returning students give for making a decision to enroll in a selected alternative education program?

3. What do the students and stakeholders in a selected Texas registered alternative education program perceive as effective practices of the program that encourage students to return and complete their educations?

This research aims to discover new and innovative strategies or at least to provide a clarification of the existing practices that are in place in a *Commended* public AEP that will be practical and effective in addressing the at-risk student populations currently being placed or choosing to attend an AEP. The *No Child Left Behind Act* and recent state of Texas compensatory funding guidelines mandate that schools narrow the achievement gap between the at-risk students and other student groups. The research may recognize the strengths of existing practices that may contribute to student achievement and may provide recommendations for improvement that can be replicated in other similar AEPs.

The proposed research project has been nurtured throughout my years as an educator and doctoral fellow at The University of Texas at Austin Department of Educational Administration and will satisfy the final requirements for a doctorate degree. My interest is in the field of dropout recovery and the innovative ways in which school districts address this population that is no longer enrolled in a regular educational setting. I hope to demonstrate the importance and role that AEPs serve in addressing a population of students that is at-risk and disadvantaged. The cumulative outcome will also add to the existing discourse about AEPs and how they serve to provide students one last chance at an education after they have opted to dropout of a formal school setting.

Your participation in this project is crucial in providing answers that may enrich at-risk and disadvantaged students, classroom teachers, school administers, state and national legislators, and existing public policy. Attached is the proposed timeline for conducting the study and a sample form letter for your consent to conduct the study. Please feel free to contact me if you need any additional information at (956) 346-0106. Your consideration in this matter is greatly appreciated.
Sincerely,

Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson, M.Ed.; M.B.A.
Administrative Assistant to the Associate Superintendent of Elementary Schools
Austin Independent School District
1111 W. 6th Street
Austin, Texas 78703-5300

Appendix E
Informed Consent to Participate
The University of Texas at Austin

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The Principal Investigator Herlinda Aguilar Wlkinson will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Title of Research Study: Student Characteristics, Reasons for Re-entry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

Principal Investigator(s) (include faculty sponsor), UT affiliation, and Telephone Number(s):
-Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson, principal investigator, University of Texas Austin, Department of Educational Administration, (956)-346-0106 (Cell)
-Martha N. Ovando, Ph.D., Faculty sponsor, University of Texas Austin, Department of Educational Administration, (512)-471-7551(Office).

Funding source: The principal investigator is conducting the research and will pay the expenses of conducting this research.

What is the purpose of this study?

The study uses case study methodology and document analysis to determine the characteristics of students that have already dropped out of a public school, but that have chosen to return to an alternative education program to complete their studies. Qualitative methodology will also determine the reasons that students have for making a decision to enroll in an AEP and the effective practices that my be found within this type of program to address their at-risk needs.

What will be done if you take part in this research study?

You may be interviewed two times for about 30-45 minutes duration for each interview. You might also participate in panel interviews, and have a non-intrusive classroom observation conducted.

What are the possible discomforts and risks?

There are no known possible discomforts or risks associated with this study.
If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now of the Principal Investigator, Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson.

What are the possible benefits to you or to others?

The study will contribute a better understanding of effective AEP practices, the reasons that compel dropouts to return to school, and the characteristics of students that enroll in this type of

educational setting. This knowledge may help educators to design effective alternative education programs under the mandates of NCLB. In addition, these student and program characteristics may help educators to influence policymakers of the need to serve students that have already dropped out. Next, the resulting study recommendations may also help those students that have not yet dropped out; specifically, students that may decide to transfer from a high school to an alternative education program to complete their studies. Moreover, an understanding of the reasons that dropouts give for making a decision to return to an AEP may further our understanding of the motivating factors behind their decisions to return. Finally, the study may help educators to develop effective intervention strategies to prevent the phenomena of dropping out of school in the first place.

If you choose to take part in this study, will it cost you anything?

There is no cost to you for participating in this study other than the time you will spend being interviewed by the principal researcher: Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson.

Will you receive compensation for your participation in this study?

You will not receive any type of compensation for participating in this study.

What if you are injured because of the study?

Participation in this study does not involve physical risk to you; therefore, no treatment will be provided for research related injury and no payment can be provided in the event of a medical problem.‖

If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to be in the study, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with The University of Texas at Austin**.**

How can you withdraw from this research study and who should I call if I have questions?

If you wish to stop your participation in this research study for any reason, you should contact Dr. Martha N. Ovando at (512) 471-7551. You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits for which you may be entitled. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Clarke A. Burnham, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 512/232-4383.

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected?

Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review my/your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. If the research project is sponsored then the sponsor also has the legal right to review my/your research records. Otherwise, your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. Furthermore, if the results

of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your identity will not be disclosed.

Please note that since this study will use **audio recordings**, participants need to know that: (a) that the interviews or sessions will not be videotaped; (b) that the cassettes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them; (c) that they will be kept in a secure place (e.g., a locked file cabinet in the investigator's office); (d) that they will be heard or viewed only for research purposes by the investigator and his or her associates; and (e) that they will be retained for possible future analysis.

Will the researchers benefit from your participation in this *study*?

The researcher will benefit from this study by allowing her to complete her doctoral studies at the University of Austin.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____

Signature and printed name of person obtaining consent **Date**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this Form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

_____

Printed Name of Subject **Date**

_____

Signature of Subject **Date**

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator **Date**

We may wish to present some of the tapes from this study at scientific conventions or as demonstrations in classrooms. Please sign below if you are willing to allow us to do so with the tape of your performance.

I hereby give permission for the tape made for this research study to be also used for educational purposes. This procedure makes it possible for you as a participant to agree to being taped for research purposes and to maintain the confidentiality of the information on that tape.

_____

Printed Name of Subject **Date**

_____

Signature of Subject **Date**

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator **Date**

Appendix F

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Student Characteristics, Reasons for Re-Entry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

You are being invited to participate in a study of alternative education programs. My name is Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson and I am a doctoral student at The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Education. This study is part of my program of work. I am asking for permission to include you in this study because the study involves gathering information from parents about their students that decide to attend an alternative education program.

If you agree to participate, I will interview you for approximately one hour in a group with other parents. I may also have to meet with you at a later time to clarify or verify portions of the interview that may not be clear to me. I will ask questions about how your student made a decision to enroll in an alternative education program and about how the school has helped them to continue or complete their studies.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your responses will not be linked to your name in any written or verbal report of this research project.

Your decision to participate will not affect you or your adolescent son or daughter's present or future relationship with The University of Texas at Austin. If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, call me at (956) 346-0106. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, call Professor Clarke Burnham, Chair of the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants at (512) 232-4383. You may also call my sponsoring professor, Dr. Martha N. Ovando at (512) 471-7551. You may keep the copy of this consent form.

You are making a decision to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission to participate in the study, simply tell me. You may discontinue your participation at any time.

_____	_____
Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian	Date
_____	_____
Signature of Investigator	Date

Appendix G

Parental Consent Form for the Participation of Minors: Selected Elements

Student Characteristics, Reasons for Re-Entry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

Your adolescent son or daughter is being invited to participate in a study of alternative education programs. My name is Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson and I am a doctoral student at The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Education. This study is part of my program of work. I am asking for permission to include your adolescent son or daughter in this study because the study involves gathering knowledge about students that decide to attend an alternative education program. I expect to have about 10 student participants in the study.
If you allow your child to participate, I will interview them for approximately one and a half hours in duration. I may also have to meet with them at a later time to clarify or verify portions of the interview that may not be clear to me. I will also need access to their permanent record file to gather state assessment information. Finally, in order to see which state or federal programs your student participates in I will need to see how they are coded in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) by the school district.
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your adolescent son or daughter will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. His or her responses will not be linked to his or her name or your name in any written or verbal report of this research project.
Your decision to allow your adolescent youth to participate will not affect your or his or her present or future relationship with The University of Texas at Austin. If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, call me at (956) 346-0106. If you have any questions or concerns about your adolescent youth‘s participation in this study, call Professor Clarke Burnham, Chair of the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants at (512) 232-4383. You may also call my sponsoring professor, Dr. Martha N. Ovando at (512) 471-7551.

You may keep the copy of this consent form.

You are making a decision about allowing your adolescent son or daughter to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your adolescent son or daughter to participate in the study, simply tell me. You may discontinue his or her participation at any time.

_____

Printed Name of Adolescent

_____ _____

Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian Date

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

―I have read the description of the study titled *Student Characteristics, Reasons for Re-entry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program* that is printed above, and I understand what the procedures are and what will happen to me in the study. I have received permission from my parent(s) to participate in the study, and I agree to participate in it. I know that I can quit the study at any time.‖

_____ _____

Signature of Minor Date

Appendix H

Prior On-Site Questionnaire: *The Participant's Background in Education*

Project: Returning Student Characteristics, Reasons for Reentry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

Date:_____
Researcher: Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson
Respondent's Name:
Current position of respondent:_____
(Description of the purpose of the project, issues of confidentiality, and aspects of the consent form.)
This study project will try and determine the characteristics of students that enroll in an alternative education program. The study will also try and determine the reasons that these students have for returning to an AEP, while the last focus of the study tries to discover the effective program practices that may help students to succeed while in an AEP.
This first step of the project is the completion of the ***"Prior On-Site Questionnaire: The Participant's Background in Education"*** that will briefly ask you to identify yourself as a possible candidate to participate further in this study. In order to continue in answering this questionnaire you must have signed *a consent form* indicating your willingness to participate with the study. Your signature on the consent form will serve as my copy of your consent. You may also keep a copy for your records. The questionnaire is confidential.

Once you have signed a consent form, (see attached), you may continue with the questionnaire (see the attached).

Appendix H- continued

Prior On-Site Questionnaire: The Participant's Background in Education.

1.) Where you a part of the staff that contributed to the achievement of the rating of *Commended* for this alternative education program during the 2001-02 school-years?
_____Yes, if response is yes, **go to question #2** and continue with the rest of the survey.
_____No, if response is no, **stop here** and do not continue with the survey. Place everything in the envelope provided, seal it, and give it to the person in charge of disbursing this questionnaire. I fully understand that if not enough campus personnel are available that I may still have the opportunity to be included in the study. At that time, the researcher will ask me to complete this questionnaire so that I may continue to participate in the study.

2.) How many years have you been in education?_____

3.) Circle all of the positions that you have held in the course of your involvement in the field of education.

Teacher‘s aide
Teacher
Counselor
Secretary
Assistant Principal
Diagnostician
Resource Teacher
Principal
Assistant Superintendent
Superintendent
Program Director
PEIMS Clerk
Parental Involvement Coordinator or Liaison
School Board Member
Volunteer
Other (*please fill in other prior positions held)*_____

4.) How many years have you worked in this district?_____

5.) How many years have you been on this particular alternative education program campus?_____

6.) Have you retired from the field of education?

_____a.) No, I have not retired from the field of education. ***(Go to Question #7 next and skip b, c, and d).***

_____b.) Yes, I have retired and spent_____number of years in the field of education.

_____c.) Yes, I have returned back to the field of education and am on the district payroll on a (Circle one of the following):

Part-time basis Full-time basis

_____d.) No, I have not returned back to the field of education and am not on the district payroll. I serve this campus in the capacity of_____(Fill in the blank).

7.) Tell me about some of the positive things about working in the alternative education program. Provided below are lined spaces for your short responses.

Responses:

A.)_____

_____

_____.

B.)_____
_____
_____.
C.)_____
_____
_____.

Thank you for participating in the completion of the ***Prior On-Site Questionnaire: The Participant's Educational Background.*** *Your responses are confidential and there is a possibility that you will be interviewed further in the future.* ***Please place this questionnaire in the envelope provided, seal it, and return to the person responsible for administering this questionnaire****.*

Note: The rest of the project will consist of panel interviews, observations, document reviews, and two interview sessions. If you are selected to continue in the next phase of this project, you will be contacted so that the first interview***:*** ***Interview #1-Focused Life History*** & **Details of the Experience** can be conducted.

Appendix I

Interview #1: Focused Life History

Project: Returning Student Characteristics, Reasons for Reentry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

Date:_____
Time of interview:_____
Place:_____
Interviewer:_____
Interviewee:_____
Position of interviewee:_____

(Briefly describe the purpose of the project, issues of confidentiality, and aspects of the consent form.)

This study project will try and determine the characteristics of students that enroll in an alternative education program. The study will also try and determine the reasons that these students have for returning to an AEP, while the last focus of the study tries to discover the effective program practices that may help students to succeed while in an AEP.

You might see me scripting notes as the interview progresses, but these notes are confidential. I will also use a tape recorder to help me keep accurate notes that ensure that your responses are collected and represented accurately during the analysis part of the research. If at any time during the interview, you wish for me to stop recording, I will do so immediately. If you need to take a break please also let me know.

Before beginning this interview, you must have signed a consent form stating that you wish to be a participant in this phase of the research project. The project will consist of panel interviews, observations, document reviews, and two interview sessions.

(Use this on-site face-to-face interview to verify the interviewee's responses on the **Prior On-Site Questionnaire: Participant's Educational Background** *to ensure accuracy.*

Question and Note taking for *Focused Life History*:

1.) Please tell about yourself (past, family, school and work experience) and how you came to be involved in the alternative education program.

Interviewer continues with ***Interview #1: The Details of Experience.***

Appendix J

Interview #1: The Details of Experience

*(Use this on-site face-to-face interview to verify the interviewee's responses on the previous session that included **Interview #1: Focused Life History** to ensure continuous accuracy).*

Questions for *Details of the Experience*:

1.) Please tell about what a typical work day looks like to you. Tell me about what you actually do on the job.

2.) Tell me about your interactions with the following:

A. Other faculty: (How do you work together and what do they do for you to make your job easier. How do they help you to meet the needs of the students?)

a.) The librarian:
b.) Other teachers:
c.) The counselor:
d.) The parent involvement coordinator/liaison
e.) The PEIMS clerk:
f.) The school secretary:

B.) Administrators:
a.) The principal:
b.) The assistant principal:
c.) Other:

C.) Parents:
D.) Office Personnel:
E.) Campus Office Personnel:
F.) The community at large:

G.) The student resource officer:
H.) The resource teachers:

3.) Tell me how you deal with the following issues or practices in your role at the alternative education program.

A.) The curriculum:
B.) Student absences:
C.) Discipline:
a.) Fighting:
b.) Insubordination:
c.) Harassment:
d.) Theft:
e.) Weapons:
f.) Drug Use:

D.) Failing students:
   a.) No homework:
   b.) Lack of knowledge and skills:
   c.) Pregnancy:
   d.) Homelessness:
   e.) Attendance:

E.) Special Population Students:
   a.) Special Education:
   b.) Gifted and Talented:
   c.) Bilingual/English as a Second Language:
   d.) Economically disadvantaged:

E.) Site-based decision-making committee involvement:

4.) Tell me what you do on a really tough day to keep yourself going or motivated to keep coming back to the alternative education program.
(Thank the interviewee and let them know that you will be reviewing the transcript/notes of this first interview session and will meet with them again in the future for the second session ***Interview #2: Reflection on the Meaning****.*

Appendix K

Interview #2: Reflection on the Meaning

Project: Returning Student Characteristics, Reasons for Reentry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

Date:_____

Time of interview:_____

Place:_____

Interviewer:_____

Interviewee:_____

Position of interviewee:_____

(Briefly re-state or describe the purpose of the project and issues of confidentiality. The consent form was already signed during ***Interview #1: Focused Life History and Details of the Experience and Details of the Experience.***

This study project will try and determine the characteristics of students that enroll in an alternative education program. The study will also try and determine the reasons that these students have for returning to an AEP, while the last focus of the study tries to discover the effective program practices that may help students to succeed while in an AEP.

You might see me scripting notes as the interview progresses, but these notes are confidential. I will also use a tape recorder to help me keep accurate notes that ensure that your responses are collected and represented accurately during the analysis part of the research. If at any time during the interview, you wish for me to stop recording, I will do so immediately. If you need to take a break please also let me know.

(Use this on-site face-to-face interview to verify the interviewee's responses on ***Interview #1: Focused Life History and Details of the Experience*** *to ensure continuous accuracy).*

Questions and Note taking for *Reflection on the Meaning*:

3.) Given what you have said about your life before you became involved in the alternative education program and given what you have told me about a your work life, how do you understand your role on this campus?

4.) What contribution do you think that you are making to society in the context of your role on the alternative education campus?

5.) Where you see yourself in the future?

6.) Tell me from your perspective your perceptions why the jobs/positions/roles that the following people have within the context or setting of the alternative education campus are important.

A.) Other faculty:

g.) The librarian:

h.) Other teachers:

i.) The counselor:

j.) The parent involvement coordinator/liaison

k.) The PEIMS clerk:
l.) The school secretary:

B.) Administrators:
c.) The principal:
d.) The assistant principal:
c.) Other:
C.) Parents:
D.) Office Personnel:
E.) Campus Office Personnel:
F.) The community at large:
G.) The student resource officer:
H.) The resource teachers:

4.) Tell me, from your perspective your perceptions, why the following are important issues to deal with within the context or setting of the alternative education program campus.

A.) The curriculum:
B.) Student absences:
C.) Discipline:
g.) Fighting:
h.) Insubordination:
i.) Harassment:
j.) Theft:
k.) Weapons:
l.) Drug Use:

D.) Failing students:
f.) No homework:
g.) Lack of knowledge and skills:
h.) Pregnancy:
i.) Homelessness:
j.) Attendance:

E.) Special Population Students:
e.) Special Education:
f.) Gifted and Talented:
g.) Bilingual/English as a Second Language:
h.) Economically disadvantaged:

F.) Site-based decision-making committee involvement:

F.) Other significant factor: Why are alternative education schools important in today‘s educational field? What role do they serve and why is this role important?

5.) Tell me, from your perspective, why your role is important within the context or setting of the alternative education program.

(Thank the interviewee and let them know that you will be reviewing the transcript/notes of this interview and will meet with them again in the future to confirm or clarify (member-check for constructs) of both interview sessions: ***Interview #1: The Focused Life History and the Details of the Experience and Interview #2: Reflection on the Meaning****.*

Appendix L

Interview #1: Focused Life History

Youth Questionnaire

Project: Returning Student Characteristics, Reasons for Reentry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

Date:_____

Time of interview:_____

Place:_____

Interviewer:_____

Interviewee:_____

(Briefly describe the purpose of the project, issues of confidentiality, and aspects of the consent form.)

This study project will try and determine the characteristics of students that enroll in an alternative education program. The study will also try and determine the reasons that these students have for returning to an AEP, while the last focus of the study tries to discover the effective program practices that may help students to succeed while in an AEP.

You might see me scripting notes as the interview progresses, but these notes are confidential. I will also use a tape recorder to help me keep accurate notes that ensure that your responses are collected and represented accurately during the analysis part of the research. If at any time during the interview, you wish for me to stop recording, I will do so immediately. If you need to take a break please also let me know.

Before beginning this interview, you and your parent or guardian must have signed a *Consent form* stating that you wish to be a participant in this phase of the research project. The project will consist of panel interviews, observations, document reviews, and two interview sessions.

Question and Note taking for *Focused Life History*:

1.) Please tell about yourself (past, family, school and work experience) and how you came to be involved in the alternative education program.

Interviewer continues with ***Interview #1: The Details of Experience.***

Appendix L-continued

Youth Questionnaire

Interview #1: The Details of Experience

(Use this on-site face-to-face interview to verify the interviewee's responses on the previous session that included ***Interview #1: Focused Life History*** *to ensure continuous accuracy).*

Questions for *Details of the Experience*:

1.) Please tell about what a typical school day looks like to you. Tell me about what you actually do here at the school.

2.) Tell me about your interactions with the following:

A. Other faculty: (How do you work together with them and what do they do for you to make your studies easier? How do they help you to meet your needs?)

a.) The librarian:
b.) Other teachers:
c.) The counselor:
d.) The parent involvement coordinator/liaison
e.) The PEIMS clerk:
f.) The school secretary:

B.) Administrators:
a.) The principal:
b.) The assistant principal:
c.) Other:

C.) Parents:
D.) Office Personnel:
E.) Campus Office Personnel:
F.) The community at large:
G.) The student resource officer:
H.) The resource teachers:

3.) Tell me how you deal with the following issues or practices in your role as a student at this alternative education program.

A.) The curriculum:
B.) Absences:
C.) Discipline:
a.) Fighting:
b.) Insubordination:
c.) Harassment:
d.) Theft:
e.) Weapons:
f.) Drug Use:

D.) Failing grades:
a.) No homework:
b.) Lack of knowledge and skills:
c.) Pregnancy:
d.) Homelessness:
e.) Attendance:

E.) As a Special Population Student:

a.) Special Education:
b.) Gifted and Talented:
c.) Bilingual/English as a Second Language:
d.) Economically disadvantaged:

E.) Site-based decision-making committee involvement:

3.) Tell me what you do on a really tough day to keep yourself going or motivated to keep coming back to the alternative education program.

4.)

(Thank the interviewee and let them know that you will be reviewing the transcript/notes of this first interview session and will meet with them again in the future for the second session ***Interview #2: Reflection on the Meaning****.*

Appendix L-continued
Youth Questionnaire
Interview #2: Reflection on the Meaning

Project: Returning Student Characteristics, Reasons for Reentry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

Date:_____
Time of interview:_____
Place:_____
Interviewer:_____
Interviewee:_____
Position of interviewee:_____

(Briefly re-state or describe the purpose of the project and issues of confidentiality. The consent form was already signed during ***Interview #1: Focused Life History and Details of the Experience and Details of the Experience.***
This study project will try and determine the characteristics of students that enroll in an alternative education program. The study will also try and determine the reasons that these students have for returning to an AEP, while the last focus of the study tries to discover the effective program practices that may help students to succeed while in an AEP.
You might see me scripting notes as the interview progresses, but these notes are confidential. I will also use a tape recorder to help me keep accurate notes that ensure that your responses are collected and represented accurately during the analysis part of the research. If at any time during the interview, you wish for me to stop recording, I will do so immediately. If you need to take a break please also let me know.

(Use this on-site face-to-face interview to verify the interviewee's responses on ***Interview #1: Focused Life History and Details of the Experience*** *to ensure continuous accuracy).*
Questions and Note taking for *Reflection on the Meaning*:

5.) Given what you have said about your life before you became involved in the alternative education program and given what you have told me about a your student life, how do you understand your role on this campus?

6.) What contribution do you think that you are making to society by returning or enrolling back in school?

7.) Where you see yourself in the future?

8.) Tell me from your perspective your perceptions why the jobs/positions/roles that the following people have within the context or setting of the alternative education campus are important.

A.) Other faculty:
g.) The librarian:
h.) Other teachers:
i.) The counselor:
j.) The parent involvement coordinator/liaison
k.) The PEIMS clerk:
l.) The school secretary:

B.) Administrators:
c.) The principal:
d.) The assistant principal:
c.) Other:
C.) Parents:
D.) Office Personnel:
E.) Campus Office Personnel:
F.) The community at large:

G.) The student resource officer:
H.) The resource teachers:

4.) Tell me, from your perspective and your perceptions as a student, why the are important issues to deal with within the context or setting of the alternative education program campus.
A.) The curriculum:
B.) Absences:
C.) Discipline:
g.) Fighting:
h.) Insubordination:
i.) Harassment:
j.) Theft:
k.) Weapons:
l.) Drug Use:

D.) Failing grades:
f.) No homework:
g.) Lack of knowledge and skills:
h.) Pregnancy:
i.) Homelessness:
j.) Attendance:

E.) As a member of a Special Population:
e.) Special Education:
f.) Gifted and Talented:
g.) Bilingual/English as a Second Language:

h.) Economically disadvantaged:

F.) Site-based decision-making committee involvement:

F.) Other significant factor: Why do you think that alternative education schools might be important in today's educational field? What role do you think they serve and why is this role important?

5.) Tell me, from your perspective as a student, why you think that your role is important within the context or setting of the alternative education program.

(Thank the interviewee and let them know that you will be reviewing the transcript/notes of this interview and will meet with them again in the future to confirm or clarify (member-check for constructs) of both interview sessions: ***Interview #1: The Focused Life History and the Details of the Experience and Interview #2: Reflection on the Meaning****.*

Appendix M

Research Itinerary

Monday XXX X, 2004	Tuesday XXXX X, 2004	Wednesday XXXX X, 2004	Thursday XXX X, 2004	Friday XXX X, 2004
8:00-8:30 a.m. Travel to District 8:30-9:30 a.m. Meet and interview campus Principal 9:30-12:00 a.m. Initial conference meeting with teachers to make appointments to interview them during the week, set up classroom observations, and to obtain consent. 12:00-1:00 p.m. LUNCH 1:00-3:30 p.m. Initial conference meeting with teachers to make appointments to interview them during the week, set up classroom observations, and to obtain consent. 3:30 -4:00 p.m. Campus Roundtable	8:00-8:30 a.m. Travel to District 8:30-9:20 a.m. Teacher Interview #1 9:20-10:10 a.m. Teacher Interview #1 10:10-11:00 a.m. Teacher Interview #1 11:00-11:50 a.m. Teacher Interview #1 12:00-1:00 p.m. LUNCH 1:00- 1:30 p.m. 1:30-2:00 p.m. 2:00-2:30 p.m. 2:30-3:30 p.m. Afternoon Classroom Observations 3:30- 6:00 TAAS Scores Review 6:00-7:00 p.m. Parent Roundtable, and obtain parental consent for student interviews.	8:00-8:30 a.m. Travel to District 8:30-9:00 a.m. 9:00-9:30 a.m. 9:30-10:00 a.m. 10:00-10:30 a.m. 10:30-11:00 a.m. 11:00-11:30 a.m. Morning Classroom Observations & or Student Interviews 12:00-1:00 p.m. LUNCH 1:30-2:20 p.m. Teacher Interview #1 2:20-3:10 p.m. Teacher Interview #1 3:10-4:00 p.m. Teacher Interview #1 4:00-5:00 p.m. District Roundtable: Superintendent & Central Office personnel	8:00-8:30 a.m. Travel to District 8:30-9:20 a.m. Teacher Interview #2 9:20-10:10 a.m. Teacher Interview #2 10:10-11:00 a.m. Teacher Interview #2 11:00-11:50 a.m. Teacher Interview #2 12:00-1:00 p.m. LUNCH 1:30-2:20 p.m. Teacher Interview #2 2:20-3:10 p.m. Teacher Interview #2 3:10-4:00 p.m. Teacher Interview #2 4:00-5:00 p.m. Student Interviews	8:00-8:30 a.m. Travel to District 8:30-9:20 a.m. 9:20-10:10 a.m. 10:10-11:00 a.m. 11:00-11:50 a.m. Times for Teacher Interview #3 or Student Interviews 12:00-1:00 p.m. LUNCH 1:30-2:20 p.m. Teacher Interview 2:20-3:10 p.m. Teacher Interview 3:10-4:00 p.m. Teacher Interview 4:00-4:30 p.m. Exit with the Superintendent & Campus Principal for possible return the following week as needed.

Appendix N
Research Budget
August XX, 2004

Project: Student Characteristics, Reasons for Reentry, and Effective Program Practices in a Selected Texas Alternative Education Program

Hotel:	$45.00 X 5 nights	=	$225.00
Meals	$25.00 X 5 days	=	$125.00
Cassette Tapes	30 X $1.99	=	$ 59.70
Reams of Paper	4 x $2.00	=	$ 20.00
Transcription Services		=	$500.00
Recorder Batteries		=	$ 10.00
Gas		=	$ 50.00
Total Budget		=	$989.70

Note: The researcher utilized a voice activated recorder, a laptop computer, and a Hewlett Packard 6L printer. These items are already owned by the researcher: Herlinda Aguilar Wilkinson

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